魔法科高校の劣等生15
古都内乱編〈下〉
The irregular at magic high school
佐島 勤
Tsutomu Sato
illustration／石田可奈
Kana Ishida
電撃文庫

魔法科高校の劣等生 15

The irregular at magic high school

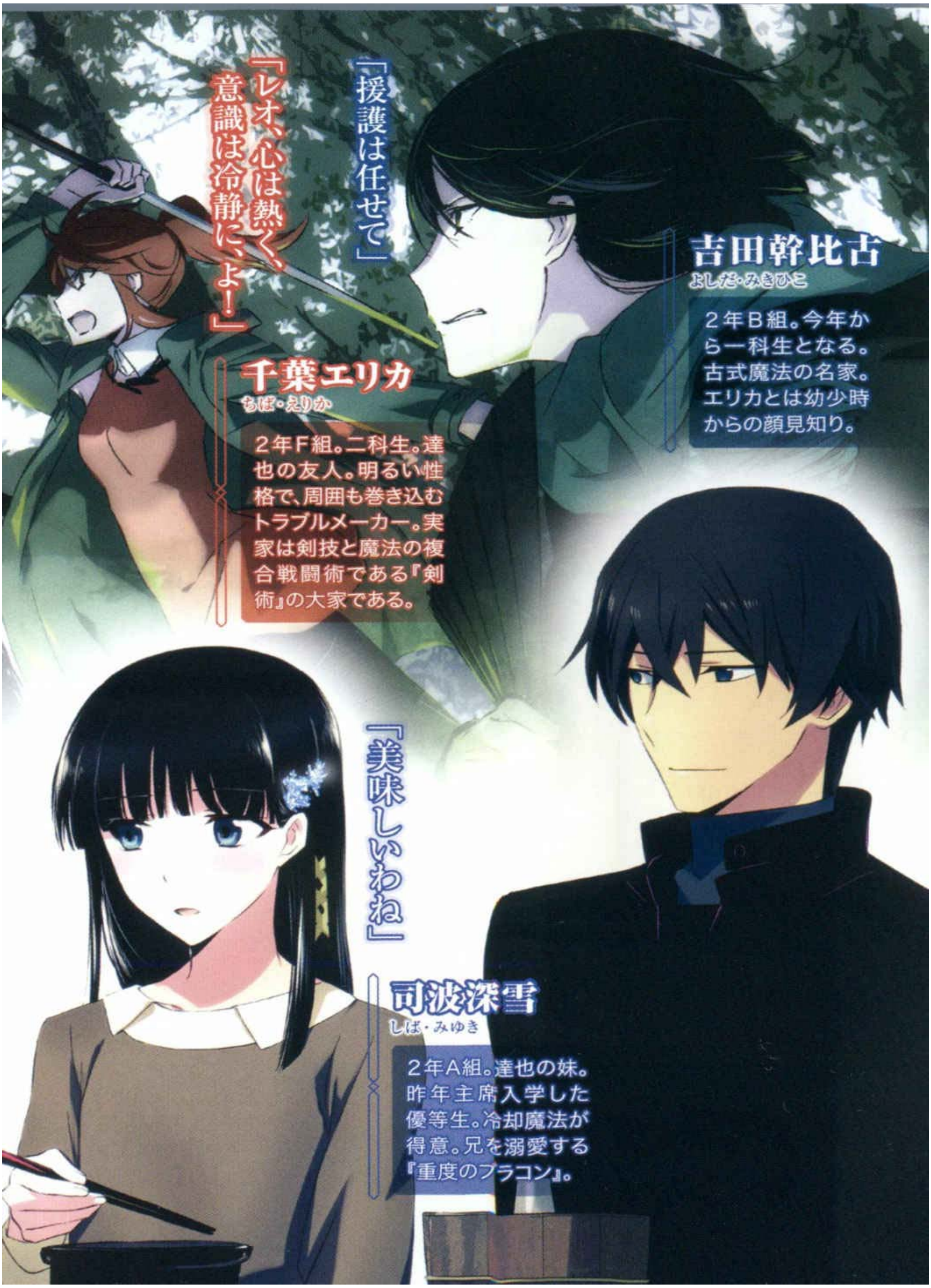
古都内乱編〈下〉

佐島勤
Tsutomu Sato

illustration／石田可奈
Kana Ishida

illustrator assistant／ジミー・ストーン、末永康子

design／BEE-PEE


「援護は任せて」
「レオ、心は熱く、意識は冷静に、よ！」
「美味しいわね」

吉田幹比古
よしだ・みきひこ

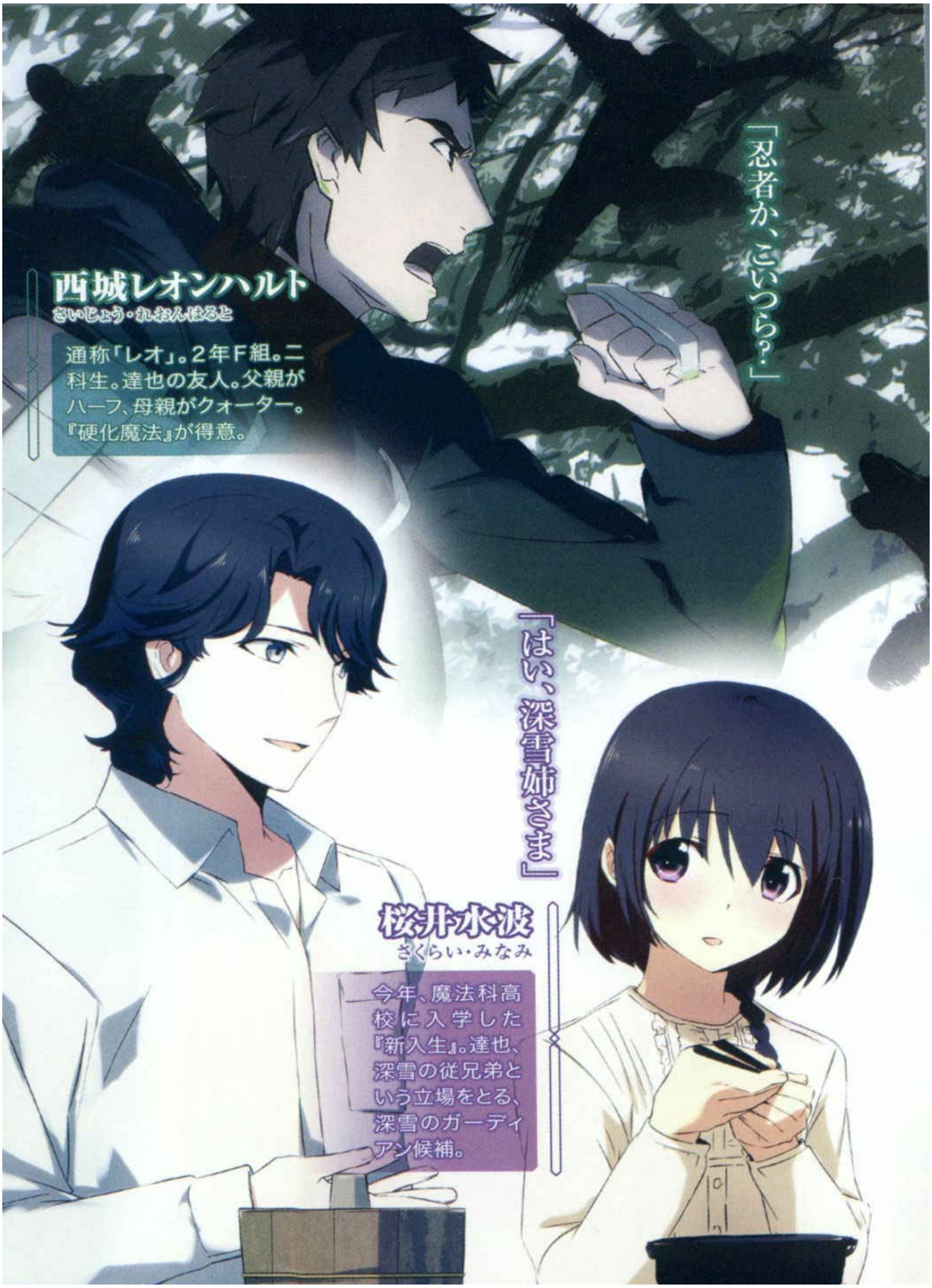
２年Ｂ組。今年から一科生となる。古式魔法の名家。エリカとは幼少時からの顔見知り。

千葉エリカ
ちば・えりか

２年Ｆ組。二科生。達也の友人。明るい性格で、周囲も巻き込むトラブルメーカー。実家は剣技と魔法の複合戦闘術である『剣術』の大家である。

司波深雪
しば・みゆき

２年Ａ組。達也の妹。昨年主席入学した優等生。冷却魔法が得意。兄を溺愛する『重度のブラコン』。

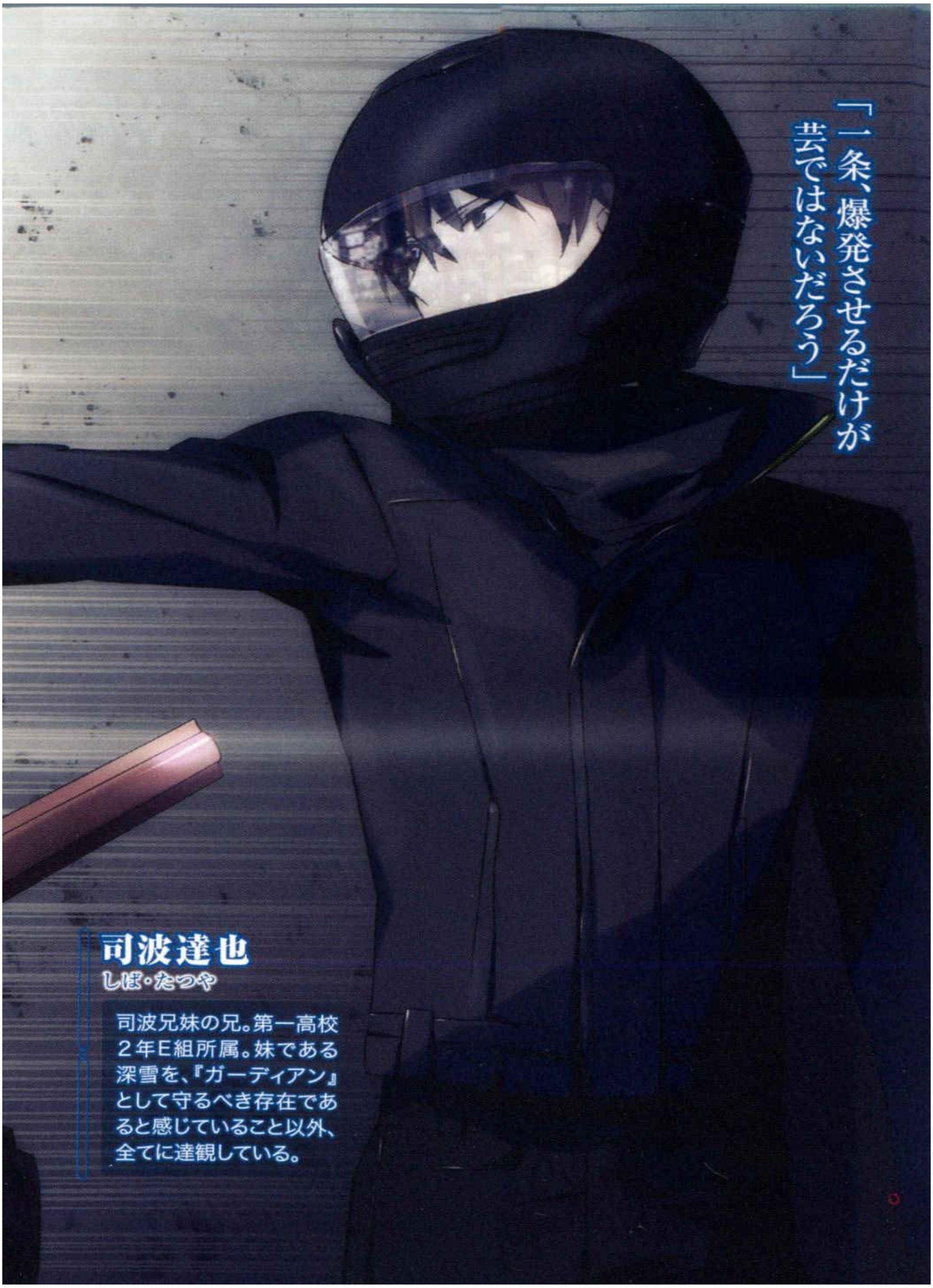

「忍者か、こいつら?」
「はい、深雪姉さま」

西城レオンハルト
さいじょう・れおんはると

通称「レオ」。2年F組。二科生。達也の友人。父親がハーフ、母親がクォーター。『硬化魔法』が得意。

桜井水波
さくらい・みなみ

今年、魔法科高校に入学した『新入生』。達也、深雪の従兄弟という立場をとる、深雪のガーディアン候補。

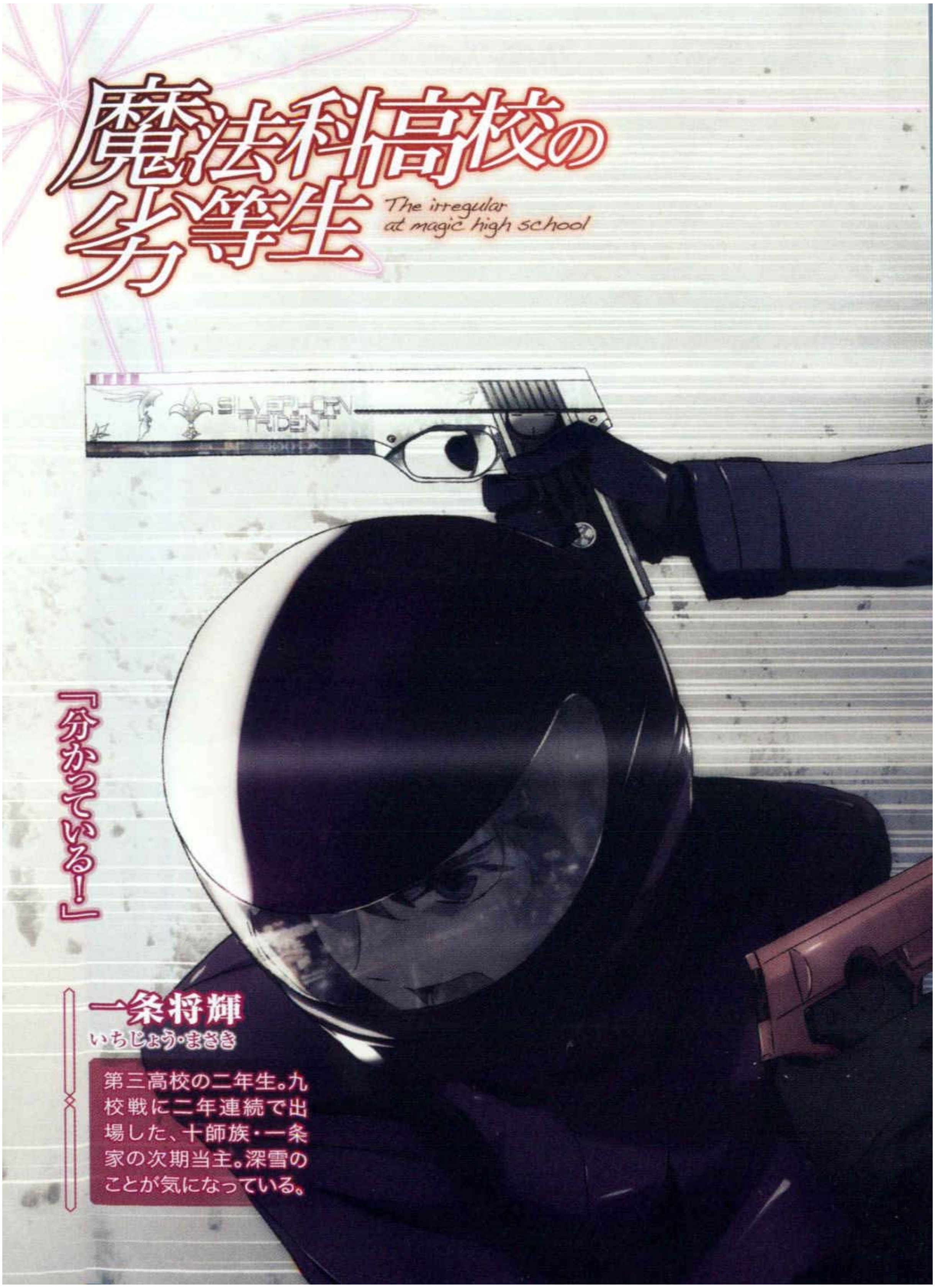


「一条、爆発させるだけが芸ではないだろう」

司波達也

しば・たつや

司波兄妹の兄。第一高校２年E組所属。妹である深雪を、『ガーディアン』として守るべき存在であると感じていること以外、全てに達観している。

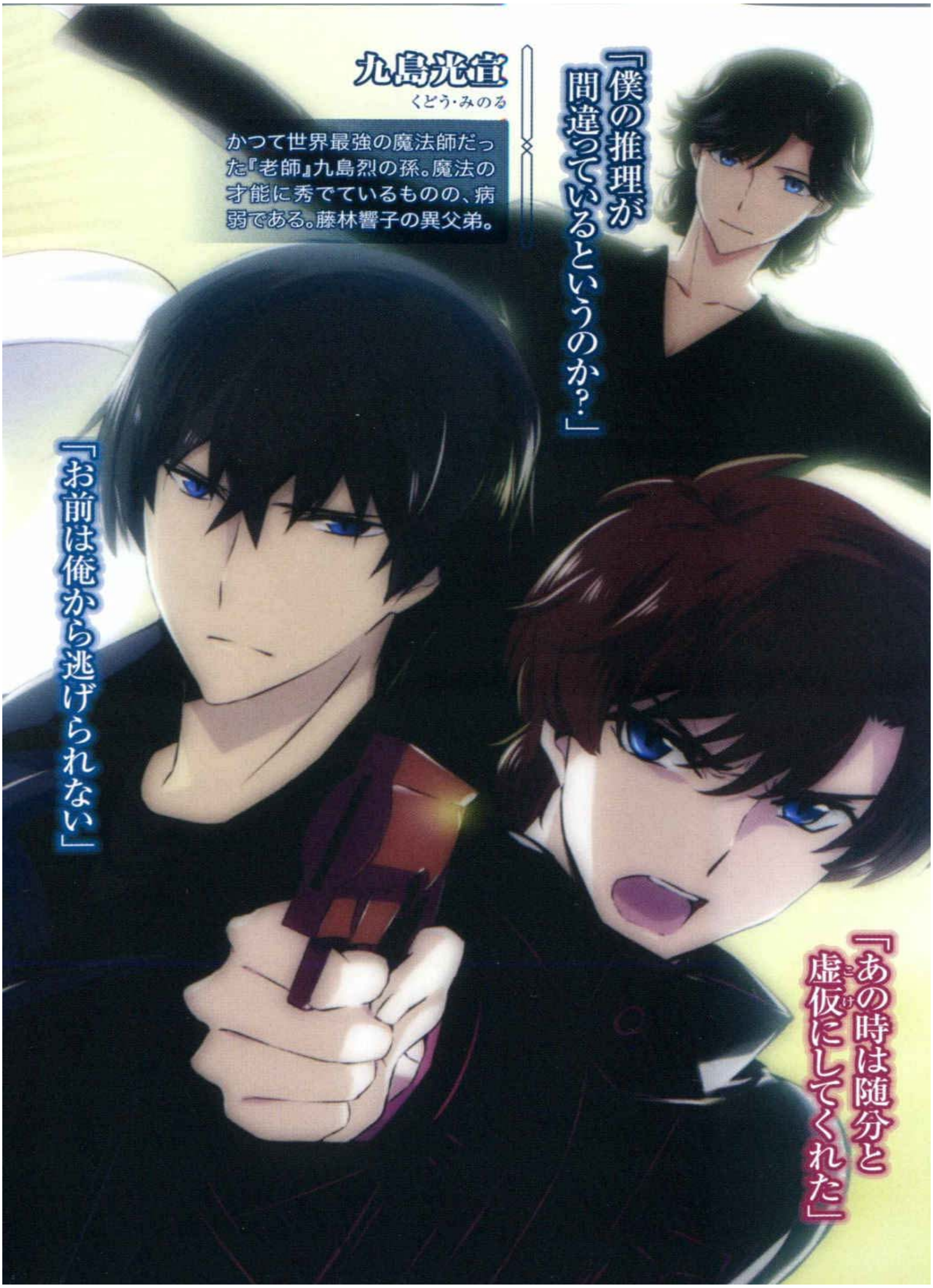

SILVERHORN TRIDENT

魔法科高校の劣等生
The irregular at magic high school

「分かっている！」

一条将輝
いちじょう・まさき

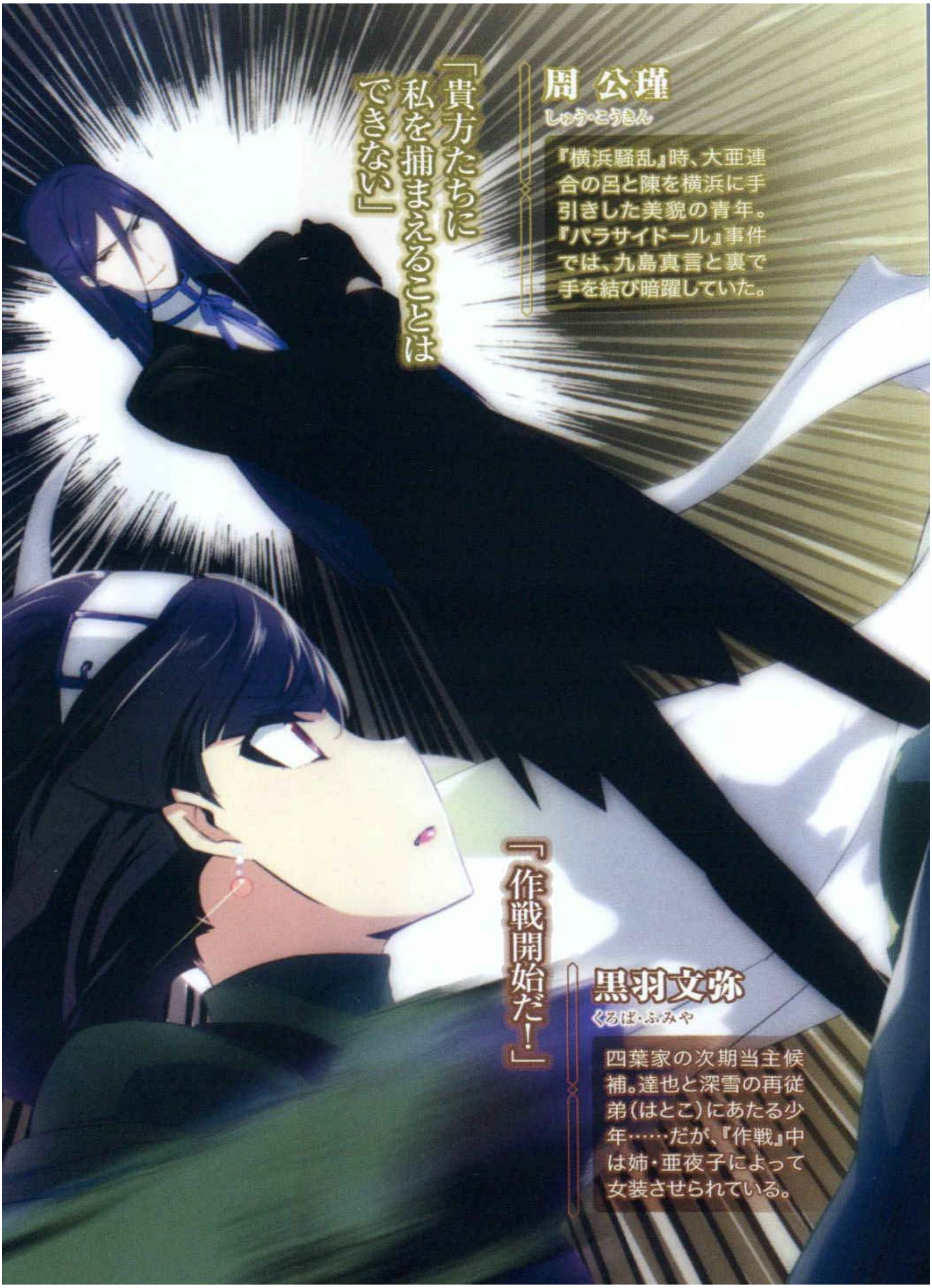
第三高校の二年生。九校戦に二年連続で出場した、十師族・一条家の次期当主。深雪のことが気になっている。



九島光宣
くどう・みのる

かつて世界最強の魔法師だった『老師』九島烈の孫。魔法の才能に秀でているものの、病弱である。藤林響子の異父弟。

「僕の推理が間違っているというのか？」
「お前は俺から逃げられない」
「あの時は随分と虚仮にしてくれた」

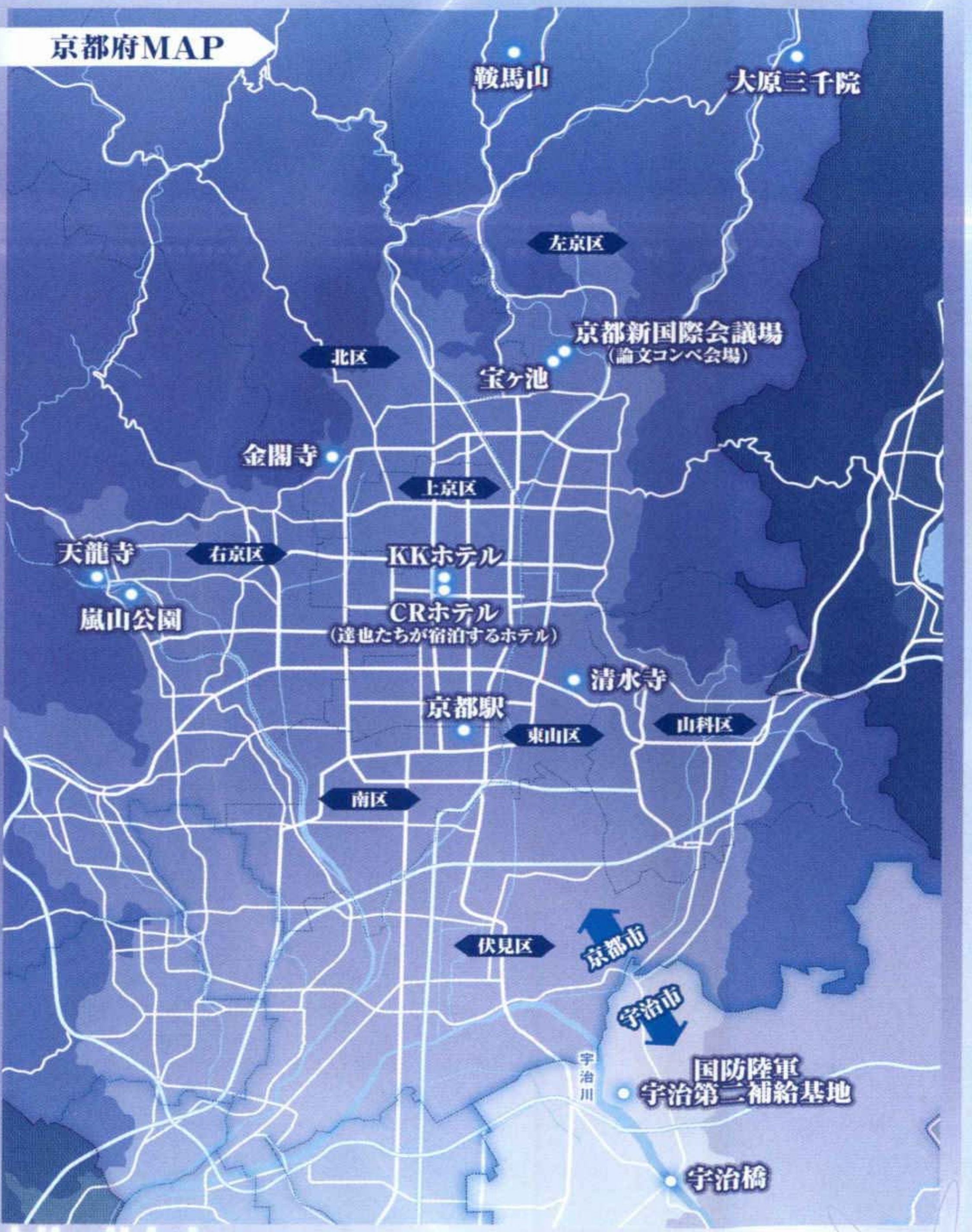

「貴方たちに私を捕まえることはできない」
「作戦開始だ！」

周 公瑾
しゅう・こうきん

『横浜騒乱』時、大亜連合の呂と陳を横浜に手引きした美貌の青年。『パラサイドール』事件では、九島真言と裏で手を結び暗躍していた。

黒羽文弥
くろば・ふみや

四葉家の次期当主候補。達也と深雪の再従弟（はとこ）にあたる少年……だが、『作戦』中は姉・亜夜子によって女装させられている。


京都府MAP
鞍馬山
大原三千院
左京区
京都新国際会議場
（論文コンペ会場）
北区
宝ヶ池
金閣寺
上京区
天龍寺
右京区
KKホテル
嵐山公園
CRホテル
（達也たちが宿泊するホテル）
清水寺
京都駅
東山区
山科区
南区
伏見区
京都市
宇治市
宇治川
国防陸軍
宇治第二補給基地
宇治橋

The irregular at magic high school

ある欠陥を抱える劣等生の兄。
全てが完全無欠な優等生の妹。
二人の兄妹が魔法科高校に入学した時から、
波乱の日々の幕が開いた――。

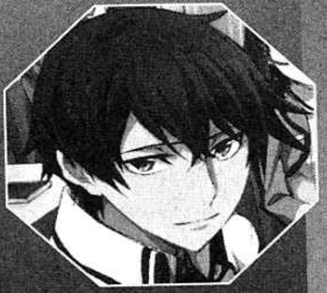
魔法科高校の劣等生15

The irregular at magic high school

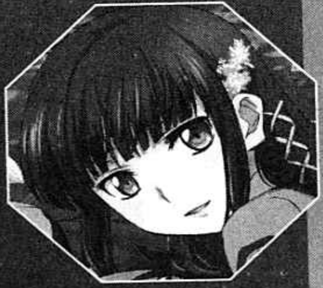
古都内乱編〈下〉

佐島 勤
Tsutomu Sato
illustration
石田可奈
Kana Ishida

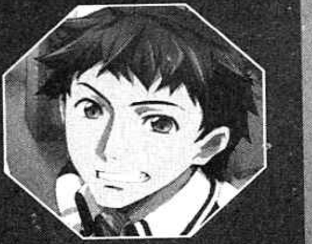
Character
キャラクター紹介



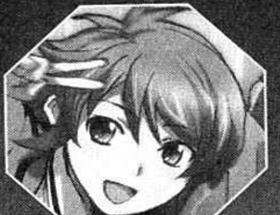
司波達也
しば・たつや
２年E組。新設された
魔工科に進学した。
全てに達観している。
妹・深雪の『ガーディアン』。



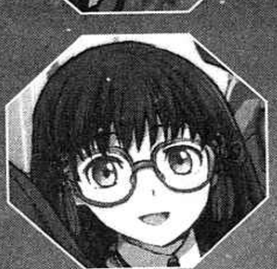
司波深雪
しば・みゆき
２年A組。達也の妹。
昨年主席入学した優等生。
冷却魔法が得意。兄を溺愛する。



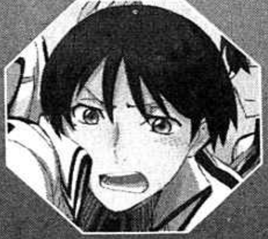
西城レオンハルト
さいじょう・れおんはると
２年F組。達也の友人。
二科生生徒。硬化魔法が得意な、
明るい性格の持ち主。



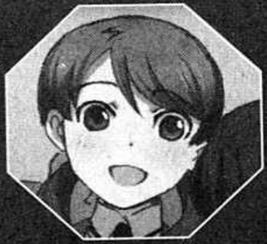
千葉エリカ
ちば・えりか
２年F組。達也の友人。
二科生生徒。チャーミングな
トラブルメーカー。



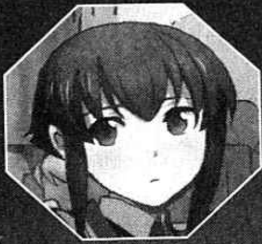
柴田美月
しばた・みづき
２年E組。今年も達也と
同じクラスになった。
霊子放射光過敏症。
少し天然が入った真面目な少女。



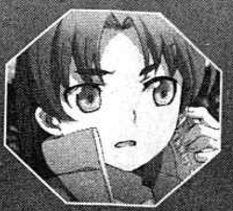
吉田幹比古
よしだ・みきひこ
２年B組。今年から一科生となる。
古式魔法の名家。
エリカとは幼少時からの顔見知り。



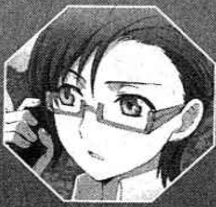
光井ほのか
みつい・ほのか
２年A組。深雪のクラスメイト。
光波振動系魔法が得意。
思い込むとやや直情的。



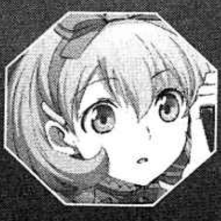
北山 雫
きたやま・しずく
２年A組。深雪のクラスメイト。
振動・加速系魔法が得意。
感情の起伏をあまり表に出さない。



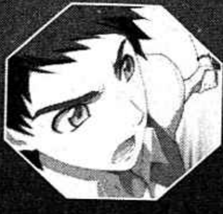
英美＝アメリア＝ゴールディ＝明智
えいみ・あめりあ・ごーるでぃ・あけち
２年B組。クォーター。
普段は『エイミィ』と
呼ばれている。
名門ゴールディ家の子女。



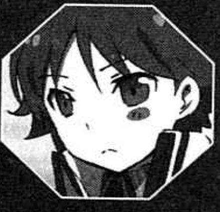
里美スバル
さとみ・すばる
２年D組。
美少年と見まごう少女。
明るくノリの良い性格。



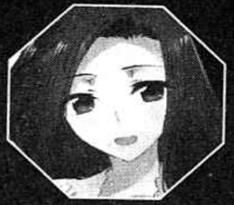
桜小路紅葉
さくらこうじ・あかは
２年B組。スバル、エイミィの友達。
私服はゴスロリ風で、
テーマパーク好き。



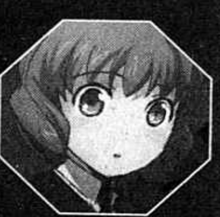
森崎 駿
もりさき・しゅん
２年A組。深雪の
クラスメイト。CAD早撃ちが得意。
一科生としてのプライドが高い。



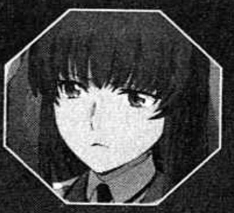
十三束 鋼
とみつか・はがね
２年E組。『レンジ・ゼロ』（射程距離ゼロ）の異名を持つ。
『マーシャル・マジック・アーツ』の使い手。



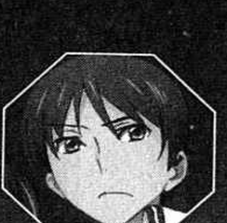
七草真由美
さえぐさ・まゆみ
卒業生。今は魔法大学生。
小悪魔的な性格を
持つものの、
攻められると弱い。



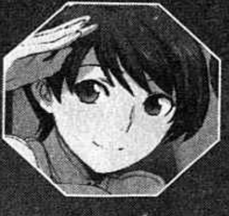
中条あずさ
なかじょう・あずさ
三年生。前・生徒会会長。
オドオドした性格で
引っ込み思案。



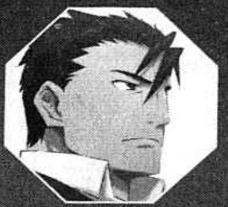
市原鈴音
いちはら・すずね
卒業生。今は魔法大学生。
冷静沈着な頭脳派。



服部刑部少丞範蔵
はっとり・ぎょうぶしょうじょう・はんぞう
三年生。前・部活連会頭。
優秀だが、生真面目
すぎる一面も。



渡辺摩利
わたなべ・まり
卒業生。真由美の親友。
物事全般にやや好戦的。

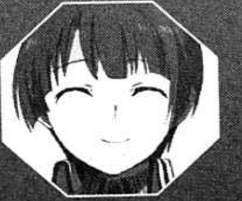


十文字克人
じゅうもんじ・かつと
卒業生。現在は
魔法大学に進学している。
達也曰く『巌（いわお）のような人物』。

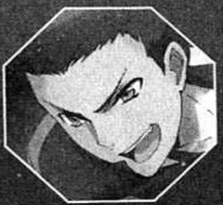
辰巳鋼太郎
たつみ・こうたろう
卒業生。元・風紀委員。豪快な性格の持ち主。

沢木 碧
さわき・みどり
三年生。風紀委員。
女性的な名前がコンプレックス。

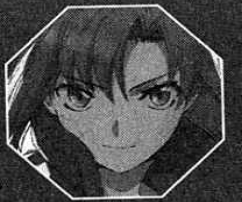
関本 勲
せきもと・いさお
卒業生。元・風紀委員。論文コンペ
校内選考次点。スパイ行為を犯した人物。



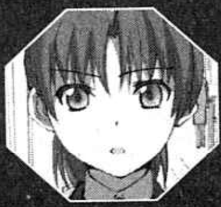
五十里 啓
いそり・けい
三年生。前・生徒会会計。
魔法理論に優れている。
花音とは許嫁同士。



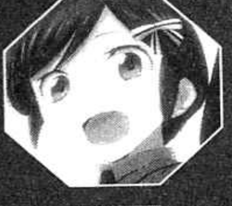
桐原武明
きりはら・たけあき
三年生。剣術部所属。
関東剣術大会中等部の
チャンピオン。



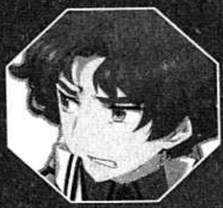
千代田花音
ちよだ・かのん
三年生。前・風紀委員長。
先輩の摩利同様に
好戦的。



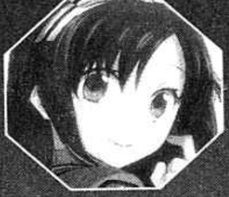
壬生紗耶香
みぶ・さやか
三年生。剣道部所属。
中等部剣道大会女子部の
全国二位。



七草香澄
さえぐさ・かすみ
今年、魔法科高校に入学した『新入生』。
七草真由美の妹。泉美の双子の姉。
元気で快活な性格。

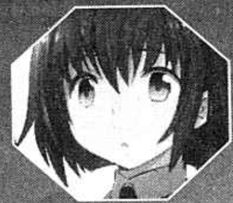


七宝琢磨
しっぽう・たくま
今年の『新入生』総代を務める生徒。
一科生。有力魔法師の家系
「師補十八家」のひとつ
『七宝』の長男。



七草泉美
さえぐさ・いずみ
今年、魔法科高校に
入学した『新入生』。
七草真由美の妹。香澄の双子の妹。
大人しく穏やかな性格。

隅守賢人
すみす・けんと
1年G組。両親がUSNAから
日本に帰化した、白人の少年。



桜井水波
さくらい・みなみ
今年、魔法科高校に入学した『新入生』。
達也、深雪の従兄弟という立場をとる、
深雪のガーディアン候補。

一条将輝
いちじょう・まさき
第三高校の二年生。
今年も九校戦に出場。
十師族・一条家の次期当主。

平河小春
ひらかわ・こはる
卒業生。昨年の九校戦では
エンジニアで参加。
論文コンペメンバーを辞退。

吉祥寺真紅郎
きちじょうじ・しんくろう
第三高校の二年生。
今年も九校戦に出場。
「カーディナル・ジョージ」の
異名で知られている。

平河千秋
ひらかわ・ちあき
２年E組所属。
達也に敵意を向ける。

一条剛毅
いちじょう・ごうき
将輝の父親。
十師族・一条家の現当主。

千倉朝子
ちくら・ともこ
三年生。九校戦新競技
『シールド・ダウン』の女子ソロ代表。

一条美登里
いちじょう・みどり
将輝の母親。
温和な性格で料理上手。

五十嵐亜実
いがらし・つぐみ
卒業生。元バイアスロン部部長。

五十嵐鷹輔
いがらし・ようすけ
二年生。亜実の弟。やや気弱な性格。

一条 茜
いちじょう・あかね
一条家の長女。将輝の妹。
今年地元の名門私立中学に入学。
真紅郎に好意を抱く。

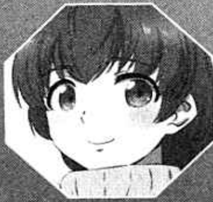
三七上ケリー
みなかみ・ケリー
三年生。九校戦
『モノリス・コード』本戦の
男子代表。

一条瑠璃
いちじょう・るり
一条家の次女。将輝の妹。
マイペースなしっかりもの。

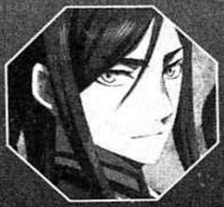
安宿怜美
あすか・さとみ
第一高校保険医。おっとり
ホンワカした笑顔が男子生徒に人気。

ジェニファー・スミス
日本に帰化した白人。
達也のクラスと魔法工学の
授業の指導教師。

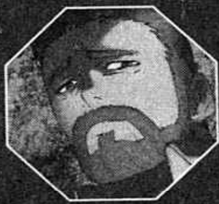
廿楽計夫
つづら・かずお
第一高校教師。専門は魔法幾何学。
論文コンペの世話役。



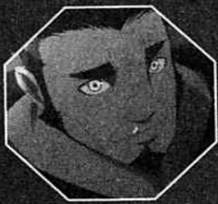
小野 遥
おの・はるか
第一高校に所属する
総合カウンセラー。
いじられ気質だが、
裏の顔も持つ。



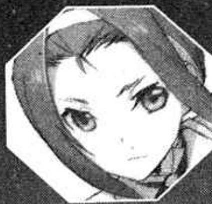
周公瑾
しゅう・こうきん
大亜連合の呂と陳を
横浜に手引きした美貌の青年。
中華街に巣くう、謎の人物。



陳祥山
チェンシャンシェン
大亜連合軍
特殊工作部隊隊長。
非情な性格の持ち主。

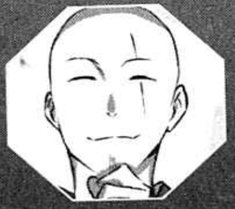


呂剛虎
ルゥガンフゥ
大亜連合軍特殊工作部隊
所属のエース魔法師。
別名『人喰い虎』。



リン
森崎が助けた少女。
フルネームは
『孫美鈴（スンメイリン）』。
香港系国際犯罪シンジケート
「無頭竜」の新たなリーダー。

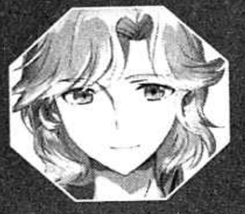
鳴瀬晴海
なるせ・はるみ
雫の従兄。国立魔法大学付属
第四高校の生徒。



九重八雲
ここのえ・やくも
古式魔法「忍術」の使い手。
達也の体術の師匠。

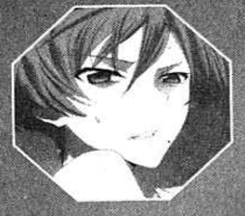
九島 烈
くどう・れつ
世界最強の魔法師の一人と
目されていた人物。
敬意を以て「老師」と呼ばれる。

九島真言
くどう・まこと
日本魔法界の長老・九島烈の息子で、
九島家の現当主。



九島光宣
くどう・みのる
真言の息子。
国立魔法大学付属
第二高校の一年生だが、
病気がちで頻繁に欠席している。
藤林響子の異父弟でもある。

九鬼 鎮
くき・まもる
九島家に従う師補十八家の一つ。
九島烈を先生と呼び
敬っている。



小和村真紀
さわむら・まき
由緒ある映画賞の主演女優部門に
ノミネートされるほどの女優。
美貌だけでなく、演技も認められている。

風間玄信
かざま・はるのぶ
陸軍101旅団・
独立魔装大隊・隊長。
階級は少佐。

真田繁留
さなだ・しげる
陸軍101旅団・
独立魔装大隊・幹部。
階級は大尉。

藤林響子
ふじばやし・きょうこ
風間の副官を務める
女性士官。階級は少尉。

佐伯広海
さえき・ひろみ
国防陸軍第101旅団旅団長。階級は少将。
独立魔装大隊隊長・風間玄信の上官。
その風貌から「銀狐」の異名を持つ。

柳 連
やなぎ・むらじ
陸軍101旅団・独立魔装大隊・幹部。階級は大尉。

山中幸典
やまなか・こうすけ
陸軍101旅団・独立魔装大隊・幹部。
軍医少佐。一級の治癒魔法師。

酒井
さかい
国防陸軍総司令部所属。階級は大佐。
対大亜連合強硬派と目されている。

名倉三郎
なくら・さぶろう
七草家に雇われている強力な魔法師。
主に真由美の身辺警護をしている。

千葉寿和
ちば・としかず
千葉エリカの長兄。
警察省のキャリア組。
一見は遊び人風。

千葉修次
ちば・なおつぐ
千葉エリカの次兄。
摩利の恋人。
千刃流剣術免許皆伝で
「千葉の麒麟児」の異名をとる。

稲垣
いながき
警察省の巡査部長。千葉寿和の部下。

アンナ=ローゼン=鹿取
あんな・ろーぜん・かとり
エリカの母。日独のハーフで、エリカの父・
千葉家当主の「妾」だった人物。

北山 潮
きたやま・うしお
雫の父親。実業界の大物。
ビジネスネームは北方潮。

北山紅音
きたやま・べにお
雫の母親。かつては、振動系魔法で
名を馳せたAランクの魔法師。

北山 航
きたやま・わたる
雫の弟。小学六年生。
姉をよく慕っている。
魔工技師を目指す。

七草弘一
さえぐさ・こういち
真由美の父で、七草家当主。
超一流の魔法師でもある。

四葉真夜
よつば・まや
達也と深雪の叔母。深夜の双子の妹。四葉家の現当主。

司波深夜
しば・みや
達也と深雪の実母。故人。精神構造干渉魔法に長けた唯一の魔法師。

葉山
はやま
真夜に仕える老齢の執事。

桜井穂波
さくらい・ほなみ
深夜の『ガーディアン』。故人。遺伝子操作により魔法資質を強化された調整体魔法師『桜』シリーズの第一世代。

黒羽 貢
くろば・みつぐ
司波深夜、四葉真夜の従弟。亜夜子、文弥の父。

司波小百合
しば・さゆり
達也と深雪の義母。二人を嫌悪している。

黒羽亜夜子
くろば・あやこ
達也と深雪の再従妹（はとこ）にあたる少女。文弥という双子の弟を持つ。第四高校の生徒。

牛山
うしやま
フォア・リーブス・テクノロジーCAD開発第三課主任。達也が信頼を置く人物。

黒羽文弥
くろば・ふみや
四葉家の次期当主候補。達也と深雪の再従弟（はとこ）にあたる少年。亜夜子という双子の姉を持つ。第四高校の生徒。

エルンスト・ローゼン
有数のCADメーカー、ローゼン・マギクラフト日本支社長。

ピクシー
魔法科高校が所有するホームヘルパーのロボット。正式名称は3H〔Humanoid Home Helper：人型家事手伝いロボット〕・タイプP94。

アンジェリーナ＝クドウ＝シールズ

USNAの魔法師部隊『スターズ』総隊長。
階級は少佐。愛称はリーナ。
戦略級魔法師「十三使徒」の一人でもある。

ヴァージニア・バランス

USNA統合参謀本部情報部内部監察局第一副局長。
階級は大佐。リーナを支援するため日本にやってきた。

シルヴィア・マーキュリー・ファースト

USNAの魔法師部隊『スターズ』惑星級魔法師。階級は准尉。
愛称はシルヴィで、『マーキュリー・ファースト』はコードネーム。
日本での作戦時は、シリウス少佐の補佐役を務める。

ベンジャミン・カノープス

USNAの魔法師部隊『スターズ』ナンバー・ツー。
階級は少佐。シリウス少佐が不在時は
総隊長を代行する。

ミカエラ・ホンゴウ

USNAより
日本に送り込まれた諜報員
（ただし本職は国防総省所属の魔法研究者）。
愛称はミア。

クレア

ハンターQ――『スターズ』になれなかった
魔法師部隊『スターダスト』の女兵士。
Qは追跡部隊の17番目を
意味する。

アルフレッド・フォーマルハウト

USNAの魔法師部隊『スターズ』一等星魔法師。
階級は中尉。愛称はフレディ。
現在は脱走兵。

レイチェル

ハンターR――『スターズ』になれなかった
魔法師部隊『スターダスト』の女兵士。
Rは追跡部隊の18番目を
意味する。

チャールズ・サリバン

USNAの魔法師部隊『スターズ』衛星級魔法師。
『デーモス・セカンド』のコードネームで呼ばれる。
現在は脱走兵。

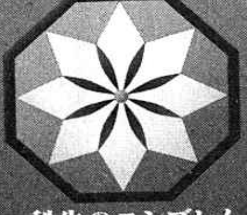
レイモンド・S・クラーク

雫が留学したUSNAバークレーにある高校の同級生。
なにかにつけ、雫にモーションを掛けてくる、白人の少年。
その正体は『七賢人』の一人。

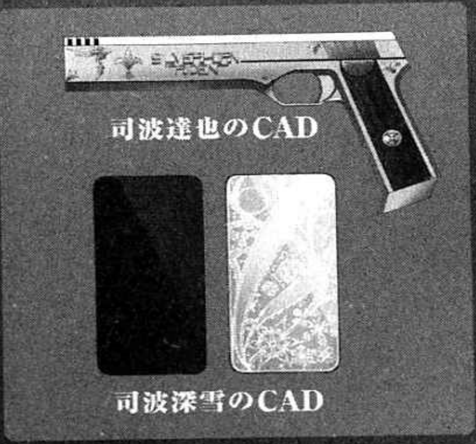
顧傑
ゲ・ジー

『七賢人』の一人。ジード・ヘイグとも呼ばれる、
大漢軍方術士部隊の生き残り。

Glossary
用語解説



一科生のエンブレム



司波達也のCAD

司波深雪のCAD

魔法科高校
国立魔法大学付属高校の通称。全国に九校設置されている。
この内、第一から第三までが一学年定員二百名で
一科・二科制度を採っている。

ブルーム、ウィード
第一高校における一科生、二科生の格差を表す隠語。
一科生の制服の左胸には八枚花弁のエンブレムが
刺繍されているが、二科生の制服にはこれが無い。

CAD〔シー・エー・ディー〕
魔法発動を簡略化させるデバイス。
内部には魔法のプログラムが記録されている。
特化型、汎用型などタイプ・形状は様々。

フォア・リーブス・テクノロジー〔FLT〕
国内CADメーカーの一つ。
元々完成品よりも魔法工学部品で有名だったが、
シルバー・モデルの開発により
一躍CADメーカーとしての知名度が増した。

トーラス・シルバー
僅か一年の間に特化型CADのソフトウェアを
十年は進歩させたと称えられる天才技術者。

エイドス〔個別情報体〕
元々はギリシア哲学用語。現代魔法学において
エイドスとは、事象に付随する情報体のことで、
「世界」にその「事象」が存在することの記録で、
「事象」が「世界」に記す足跡とも言える。
現代魔法学における「魔法」の定義は、エイドスを改変することによって、
その本体である「事象」を改変する技術とされている。

イデア〔情報体次元〕
元々はギリシア哲学用語。現代魔法学においてイデアとは、エイドスが記録されるプラットフォームのこと。
魔法の一次的形態は、このイデアというプラットフォームに魔法式を出力して、
そこに記録されているエイドスを書き換える技術である。

起動式
魔法の設計図であり、魔法を構築するためのプログラム。
CADには起動式のデータが圧縮保存されており、
魔法師から流し込まれたサイオン波を展開したデータに従って信号化し、魔法師に返す。

サイオン（想子）
心霊現象の次元に属する非物質粒子で、認識や思考結果を記録する情報素子のこと。
現代魔法の理論的基盤であるエイドス、現代魔法の根幹を支える技術である起動式や魔法式は
サイオンで構築された情報体である。

プシオン（霊子）
心霊現象の次元に属する非物質粒子で、その存在は確認されているがその正体、その機能については
未だ解明されていない。一般的な魔法師は、活性化したプシオンを「感じる」ことができるにとどまる。

魔法師
『魔法技能師』の略語。魔法技能師とは、実用レベルで魔法を行使するスキルを持つ者の総称。

魔法式
事象に付随する情報を一時的に改変する為の情報体。魔法師が保有するサイオンで構築されている。

魔法演算領域
魔法式を構築する精神領域。魔法という才能の、いわば本体。魔法師の無意識領域に存在し、
魔法師は通常、魔法演算領域を意識して使うことは出来ても、そこで行われている処理のプロセスを
意識することは出来ない。魔法演算領域は、魔法師自身にとってもブラックボックスと言える。

魔法式の出力プロセス
❶起動式をCADから受信する。これを「起動式の読込」という。
❷起動式に変数を追加して魔法演算領域に送る。
❸起動式と変数から魔法式を構築する。
❹構築した魔法式を、無意識領域の最上層にして
意識領域の最下層たる「ルート」に転送、意識と無意識の
狭間に存在する「ゲート」から、イデアへ出力する。
❺イデアに出力された魔法式は、指定された座標の
エイドスに干渉しこれを書き換える。

単一系統・単一工程の魔法で、この五段階のプロセスを
半秒以内で完了させることが、「実用レベル」の
魔法師としての目安になる。

魔法の評価基準（魔法力）
サイオン情報体を構築する速さが魔法の処理能力であり、
構築できる情報体の規模が魔法のキャパシティであり、
魔法式がエイドスを書き換える強さが干渉力、
この三つを総合して魔法力と呼ばれる。

基本コード仮説
「加速」「加重」「移動」「振動」「収束」「発散」「吸収」「放出」の四系統八種にそれぞれ対応した
プラスとマイナス、合計十六種類の基本となる魔法式が存在していて、
この十六種類を組み合わせることで全ての系統魔法を構築することができるという理論。

系統魔法
四系統八種に属する魔法のこと。

系統外魔法
物質的な現象ではなく精神的な現象を操作する魔法の総称。
心霊存在を使役する神霊魔法・精霊魔法から読心、幽体分離、意識操作まで多種にわたる。

十師族
日本で最強の魔法師集団。一条（いちじょう）、一之倉（いちのくら）、一色（いっしき）、二木（ふたつぎ）、
二階堂（にかいどう）、二瓶（にへい）、三矢（みつや）、三日月（みかづき）、四葉（よつば）、五輪（いつわ）、
五頭（ごとう）、五味（いつみ）、六塚（むつづか）、六角（ろっかく）、六郷（ろくごう）、六本木（ろっぽんぎ）、
七草（さえぐさ）、七宝（しっぽう）、七夕（たなばた）、七瀬（ななせ）、八代（やつしろ）、八朔（はっさく）、
八幡（はちまん）、九島（くどう）、九鬼（くき）、九頭見（くずみ）、十文字（じゅうもんじ）、十山（とおやま）の
二十八の家系から四年に一度の「十師族選定会議」で選ばれた十の家系が『十師族』を名乗る。

数字付き
十師族の苗字に一から十までの数字が入っているように、百家の中でも本流とされている家系の
苗字には“『千』代田”、“『五十』里”、“『千』葉”家の様に、十一以上の数字が入っている。
数値の大小が力の強弱を表すものではないが、苗字に数字が入っているかどうかは、
血筋が大きく物を言う、魔法師の力量を推測する一つの目安となる。

数字落ち
エクストラ・ナンバーズ、略して「エクストラ」とも呼ばれる、「数字」を剥奪された魔法師の一族。
かつて、魔法師が兵器であり実験体サンプルであった頃、「成功例」としてナンバーを与えられた
魔法師が、「成功例」に相応しい成果を上げられなかった為に捺された烙印。

様々な魔法

●コキュートス

精神を凍結させる系統外魔法。凍結した精神は肉体に死を命じることも出来ず、
この魔法を掛けられた相手は、精神の「静止」に伴い肉体も停止・硬直してしまう。
精神と肉体の相互作用により、肉体の部分的な結晶化が観測されることもある。

●地鳴り

独立情報体「精霊」を媒体として地面を振動させる古式魔法。

●術式解散〔グラム・ディスパージョン〕

魔法の本体である魔法式を、意味の有る構造を持たないサイオン粒子群に分解する魔法。
魔法式は事象に付随する情報体に作用するという性質上、その情報構造が露出していなければならず、
魔法式そのものに対する干渉を防ぐ手立ては無い。

●術式解体〔グラム・デモリッション〕

圧縮したサイオン粒子の塊をイデアを経由せずに対象物へ直接ぶつけて爆発させ、そこに付け加えられた
起動式や魔法式などの、魔法を記録したサイオン情報体を吹き飛ばしてしまう無系統魔法。
魔法といっても、事象改変の為の魔法式としての構造を持たないサイオンの砲弾であるため情報強化や
広域干渉には影響されない。また、砲弾自体の持つ圧力がキャスト・ジャミングの影響も撥ね返してしまう。
物理的な作用が皆無である故に、どんな障碍物でも防ぐことは出来ない。

●地雷原

土、岩、砂、コンクリートなど、材質は問わず、
とにかく「地面」という概念を有する固体に強い振動を与える魔法。

●地割れ

独立情報体「精霊」を媒体として地面を線上に押し潰し、
一見地面を引き裂いたかのような外観を作り出す魔法。

●ドライ・ブリザード

空気中の二酸化炭素を集め、ドライアイスの粒子を作り出し、
凍結過程で余った熱エネルギーを運動エネルギーに変換してドライアイス粒子を高速で飛ばす魔法。

●這い寄る雷蛇〔スリザリン・サンダース〕

『ドライ・ブリザード』のドライアイス気化によって水蒸気を凝結させ、気化した二酸化炭素を
溶け込ませた導電性の高い霧を作り出した上で、振動系魔法と放出系魔法で摩擦電気を発生させる。
そして、炭酸ガスが溶け込んだ霧や水滴を導線として敵に電撃を浴びせるコンビネーション魔法。

●ニブルヘイム

振動減速系広域魔法。大容積の空気を冷却し、
それを移動させることで広い範囲を凍結させる。
端的に言えば、超大型の冷凍庫を作り出すようなものである。
発動時に生じる白い霧は空中で凍結した氷や
ドライアイスの粒子だが、レベルを上げると凝結した
液体窒素の霧が混じることもある。

●爆裂

対象物内部の液体を気化させる発散系魔法。
生物ならば体液が気化して身体が破裂、
内燃機関動力の機械ならば燃料が気化して爆散する。
燃料電池でも結果は同じで、可燃性の燃料を搭載していなくても、
バッテリー液や油圧液や冷却液や潤滑液など、およそ液体を搭載していない機械は存在しないため、
『爆裂』が発動すればほぼあらゆる機械が破壊され停止する。

●乱れ髪

角度を指定して風向きを変えて行くのではなく、「もつれさせる」という曖昧な結果をもたらす
気流操作により、地面すれすれの気流を起こして相手の足に草を絡みつかせる古式魔法。
ある程度丈の高い草が生えている野原でのみ使用可能。

魔法剣

魔法による戦闘方法には魔法それ自体を武器にする戦い方の他に、
魔法で武器を強化・操作する技法がある。
銃や弓矢などの飛び道具と組み合わせる術式が多数派だが、
日本では剣技と魔法を組み合わせて戦う「剣術」も発達しており、
現代魔法と古式魔法の双方に魔法剣とも言うべき専用の魔法が編み出されている。

1. 高周波（こうしゅうは）ブレード

刀身を高速振動させ、接触物の分子結合力を超えた振動を伝播させることで
固体を局所的に液状化して切断する魔法。刀身の自壊を防止する術式とワンセットで使用される。

2. 圧斬り（へしきり）

刃先に斬撃方向に対して左右垂直方向の斥力を発生させ、
刃が接触した物体を押し開くように割断する魔法。
斥力場の幅は1ミリ未満の小さなものだが光に干渉する程の強度がある為、
正面から見ると刃先が黒い線になる。

3. ドウジ斬り（童子斬り）

源氏の秘剣として伝承されていた古式魔法。二本の刃を遠隔操作し、
手に持つ刀と合わせて三本の刀で相手を取り囲むようにして同時に切りつける魔法剣技。
本来の意味である「同時斬り」を「童子斬り」の名に隠していた。

4. 斬鉄（ざんてつ）

千葉一門の秘剣。刀を鋼と鉄の塊ではなく、「刀」という単一概念の存在として定義し、
魔法式で設定した斬撃線に沿って動かす移動系統魔法。
単一概念存在と定義された「刀」はあたかも単分子結晶の刃の様に、
折れることも曲がることも欠けることもなく、斬撃線に沿ってあらゆる物体を切り裂く。

5. 迅雷斬鉄（じんらいざんてつ）

専用の武装デバイス「雷丸（いかづちまる）」を用いた「斬鉄」の発展形。
刀と剣士を一つの集合概念として定義することで
接敵から斬撃までの一連の動作が一切の狂い無く高速実行される。

6. 山津波（やまつなみ）

全長１８０センチの長大な専用武器「大蛇丸（おろちまる）」を用いた千葉一門の秘剣。
自分と刀に掛かる慣性を極小化して敵に高速接近し、
インパクトの瞬間、消していた慣性を上乗せして刀身の慣性を増幅し対象物に叩きつける。
この偽りの慣性質量は助走が長ければ長いほど増大し、最大で十トンに及ぶ。

7. 薄羽蜻蛉（うすばかげろう）

カーボンナノチューブを織って作られた厚さ五ナノメートルの極薄シートを
硬化魔法で完全平面に固定して刃とする魔法。
薄羽蜻蛉で作られた刀身はどんな刀剣、どんな剃刀よりも鋭い切れ味を持つが、
刃を動かす為のサポートが術式に含まれていないので、術者は刀の操作技術と腕力を要求される。

戦略級魔法師・十三使徒

　現代魔法は高度な科学技術の中で育まれてきたものである為、軍事的に強力な魔法の開発が可能な国家は限られている。その結果、大規模破壊兵器に匹敵する戦略級魔法を開発できたのは一握りの国家だった。

　ただ開発した魔法を同盟国に供与することは行われており、戦略級魔法に高い適性を示した同盟国の魔法師が戦略級魔法師として認められている例もある。

　2095年４月段階で、国家により戦略級魔法に適性を認められ対外的に公表された魔法師は13名。彼らは十三使徒と呼ばれ、世界の軍事バランスの重要ファクターと見なされていた。十三使徒の所属国、氏名、戦略級魔法の名称は以下のとおり。

USNA

■アンジー・シリウス：「ヘビィ・メタル・バースト」
■エリオット・ミラー：「リヴァイアサン」
■ローラン・バルト：「リヴァイアサン」
※この中でスターズに所属するのはアンジー・シリウスのみであり、エリオット・ミラーはアラスカ基地、ローラン・バルトは国外のジブラルタル基地から基本的に動くことはない。

新ソビエト連邦

■イーゴリ・アンドレイビッチ・ベゾブラゾフ：「トゥマーン・ボンバ」
■レオニード・コンドラチェンコ：「シムリャー・アールミヤ」
※コンドラチェンコは高齢の為、黒海基地から基本的に動くことはない。

大亜細亜連合

■劉雲徳（りゅううんとく）：「霹靂塔」
※劉雲徳は2095年10月31日の対日戦闘で戦死している。

インド・ペルシア連邦

■バラット・チャンドラ・カーン：「アグニ・ダウンバースト」

日本

■五輪 澪（いつわみお）：「深淵（アビス）」

ブラジル

■ミゲル・ディアス：「シンクロライナー・フュージョン」
※魔法式はＵＳＮＡより供与されたもの。

イギリス

■ウィリアム・マクロード：「オゾンサークル」

ドイツ

■カーラ・シュミット：「オゾンサークル」
※オゾンサークルはオゾンホール対策として分裂前のＥＵで共同研究された魔法を原型としており、イギリスで完成した魔法式が協定により旧ＥＵ諸国に公開された。

トルコ

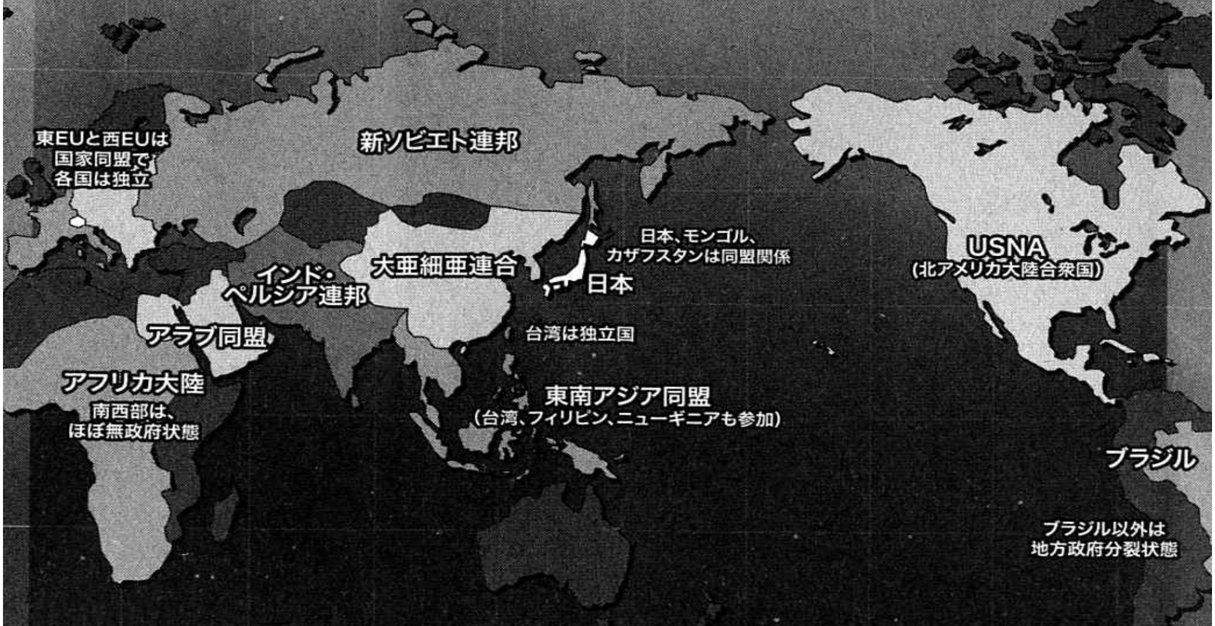
■アリ・シャーヒーン：「バハムート」
※魔法式はＵＳＮＡと日本の共同で開発されたものであり、日本主導で供与された。

タイ

■ソム・チャイ・ブンナーク：「アグニ・ダウンバースト」
※魔法式はインド・ペルシアより供与されたもの。

The International Situation

2096年現在の世界情勢


東EUと西EUは
国家同盟で
各国は独立
新ソビエト連邦
日本、モンゴル、
カザフスタンは同盟関係
大亜細亜連合
インド・
ペルシア連邦
日本
USNA
（北アメリカ大陸合衆国）
アラブ同盟
台湾は独立国
アフリカ大陸
南西部は、
ほぼ無政府状態
東南アジア同盟
（台湾、フィリピン、ニューギニアも参加）
ブラジル
ブラジル以外は
地方政府分裂状態

[illegible]

　世界の寒冷化を直接の契機とする第三次世界大戦、二〇年世界群発戦争により世界の地図は大きく塗り替えられた。現在の状況は以下のとおり。

　USAはカナダ及びメキシコからパナマまでの諸国を併合して北アメリカ大陸合衆国（USNA）を形成。

　ロシアはウクライナ、ベラルーシを再吸収して新ソビエト連邦（新ソ連）を形成。

　中国はビルマ北部、ベトナム北部、ラオス北部、朝鮮半島を征服して大亜細亜連合（大亜連合）を形成。

　インドとイランは中央アジア諸国（トルクメニスタン、ウズベキスタン、タジキスタン、アフガニスタン）及び南アジア諸国（パキスタン、ネパール、ブータン、バングラデシュ、スリランカ）を呑み込んでインド・ペルシア連邦を形成。

　他のアジア・アラブ諸国は地域ごとに軍事同盟を締結し新ソ連、大亜連合、インド・ペルシアの三大国に対抗。

　オーストラリアは事実上の鎖国を選択。

　EUは統合に失敗し、ドイツとフランスを境に東西分裂。東西EUも統合国家の形成に至らず、結合は戦前よりむしろ弱体化している。

　アフリカは諸国の半分が国家ごと消滅し、生き残った国家も辛うじて都市周辺の支配権を維持している状態となっている。

　南アメリカはブラジルを除き地方政府レベルの小国分立状態に陥っている。

The irregular
at magic high school

Synopsis of the Previous Volume

Sunday, late September of 2096 AD, the National Magic High Schools will hold the Thesis Competition. The Kuroba twins paid a visit to Tatsuya's place. They brought a letter from the Yotsuba Family Head, Yotsuba Maya. The content of the letter was a request of cooperation for the pursuit of Zhou Gongjin, the mastermind of the Yokohama Incident. It wasn’t an order, but a request. In order to chase the traditionalists who hid in Nara, Tatsuya visited the Kudou family manor in Nara. Over there, Tatsuya and company met with a boy who was as beautiful as Miyuki named, Kudou Minoru.

With his guidance Tatsuya explored the territory of Zhou Gongjin's traditionalists and of the magicians from the continent with Taoist backgrounds. Meanwhile, the Saegusa family head, Saegusa Kouichi, felt that he'd been betrayed and sent Nakura to assassinate Zhou. Nakura went to Kyoto, and had engaged in combat against Zhou. He was defeated and died.

After receiving the news that her bodyguard suddenly died, Mayumi began to move in order to search for the truth.

Chapter 6

October 15th, 2096, after school, two weeks before the Thesis Competition, First High School was full of commotion due to the preparations. Despite that, the current buzz was due to something else entirely different.

They were talking about a sudden visitor. The students from second and third years' were familiar with this visitor; even the freshmen could hardly miss the presence of the popular OG[1].

The person in question, Saegusa Mayumi, was walking towards the guest room. The school seemed to have decided to treat her as a member of the 10MC instead of as the former Student Council President; a daughter of the Saegusa family. Mayumi requested to see Tatsuya alone. This was due to the nature of her request.

"I'm sorry, Tatsuya-kun. I thought it was best to come to First High to talk to you..."

Mayumi expressed her thoughts and bowed; probably, because she noticed the commotion she had caused. Most likely not because she heard the rumors, since her skill of perception was through sight, not by hearing. While walking to the guest room the commotion from everyone in sight could be heard. By now, they've become the subject of curiosity and speculation. It's hardly possible for her to not be aware of the situation.

"No, please don't worry."

Tatsuya had his share of being gossiped about due to his position and ability. But, his answer was not meant to be consolation for Mayumi. Certainly, the fact that she came to visit the school meant that there would be rumors going on for 75 days[2]. Still, it's better than to be disturbed at home. There was a mountain of things that he didn't want to show to a member of the 10MC in his house. Of course, he said it casually but he couldn't ignore the risks of Mayumi ever seeing them.

It is more convenient for Tatsuya that Mayumi chose to come to school rather than his house. It would be quite easy for her to obtain his address, but she blatantly chose to be gossiped about. Though Tatsuya could hardly care about such baseless rumors. And yet, she chose to come to school; she must have been considerate of Tatsuya. —He reached this conclusion based on her actions.

"How do you do?"

Mayumi seemed to be quite tense, unbefitting of her character.

Tatsuya thought, despite being tense, she didn't forget to start with words of greeting. It's hard to say that such an extent was required.

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[1] OG: Old Girl (ex-female student of First High)

[2] The original word: uwasabanashi o nana jū go-kakan, literally: 75 days life span of rumor, meaning: rumors in the world do not last long, it is something to be forgotten soon by its nature.

At this rate, there's a chance of wasting time. With that in mind, Tatsuya decided to take the lead.

"This year, I won't be as busy, since I'm only in charge of the security for the event day itself."

"Is-is that so? It's surprising for you to not join the competition team.”

"That's why, depending on your request, I might be able to assist you."

Tatsuya didn't think that Mayumi came just to see him. They don’t have that sort of 'intimate relationship' where the other party could be convinced with words like "I came to meet you because I wanted to see you. This is not to say that they have a normal Senpai-kouhai relationship, but for her to come to meet Tatsuya there must be something that she wanted to ask for.

"...You're right. You can't help it even if it's a waste of time."

Mayumi's eyes were still hesitating. But as he had said, at this rate they will only waste their time. Both Mayumi and Tatsuya couldn't possibly have an unlimited amount of free time. Since she visited Tatsuya with something on her mind, there's no way she would leave First High dejectedly without even delivering her request.

"I wonder if Tatsuya-kun remembers Nakura-san."

"Yes, my condolences."

"Please don't be concerned. Tatsuya-kun, you know about what happened to him?"

"I saw the local news."

"Did you collect such information for the Thesis Competition security preparation?"

"Well, something along those lines."

"…Then."

Mayumi paused for a split second, not to avoid the main issue, but to shake the last bit of hesitation.

"Do you know about his cause of death?"

"Only that he was murdered."

"I guess that's the extent of the published information."

A bitter smile floated on Mayumi's lips, unexpectedly letting out her feelings.

"You're right. Nakura-san was murdered, and I don't know who the culprit is."

Tatsuya showed slight confusion at her words.

"You're not looking into it?"

"My father…"

Mayumi stopped briefly, but she decided to discard her hesitation.

"My father knows who killed Nakura-san."

Tatsuya didn’t hide his astonishment.

"Did your father admit this?"

"No. But I'm sure he knows; at the very least he has an idea. Nakura-san had been ordered by my father to go on a secret mission in Kyoto."

"A secret mission in Kyoto, huh..."

If you used the familiar expression "undercover work" to Tatsuya, that will be referred to as illegal work.

"I didn't get to hear this directly either. My father didn’t say anything besides 'a certain work'. I was told that 'I don't need to know'."

"I see."

That was the same as saying 'let him do the dirty work'. Tatsuya thought that perhaps Saegusa Kouichi has no intention to hide it.

"So then Senpai, what do you want to do?"

Mayumi had hoped that this question would never arise. However, Tatsuya immediately asked it and stared into her eyes, making her wince her eyes for a little while.

Yet, Mayumi didn't want to silently face down. She was empowered by her sense of duty and righteousness and spoke to Tatsuya face to face.

"I want to know the truth."

"Do you want to identify the culprit?"

"Yes."

There was a slight delay before she answered. But that didn’t mean that Mayumi was hesitating, she was just trying to calm her heart down before it started beating faster.

"I'll say it upfront. My relationship with Nakura-san was never a close one."

Hearing Mayumi's confession, Tatsuya was amazed. However, he quickly suppressed his mouth so as to urge her to continue.

"My relationship with Nakura-san was strictly business-based. I never thought of him as more than a bodyguard."

"Even so, you still want to search for the culprit? Even though the risk is hardly small."

Tatsuya tried to lightly provoke Mayumi.

He received a piercing stare in reply.

"Don't take me wrong. I'm not doing this out of sympathy."

"Then why?"

"My bodyguard was killed in one of the Saegusa Family's missions. Though I know that he was not ordered to die, it was a job with a high risk of death so the result is the same. I don't want to avert my eyes from the truth. As a member of the Saegusa Family, at the very least I want to know the truth."

"How commendable."

Tatsuya sighed.

Mayumi lifted her eyebrows.

"But."

Even when she raised her voice, Tatsuya continued with a cold tone.

"In the end, it's only for your own self-satisfaction, Senpai you should understand this as well."

"Hmph, that's right. But, there's nothing wrong with self-satisfaction, right?”

That was not a voice of desperation, but one filled with strong will, even Tatsuya couldn't immediately think of words of rebuttal.

"In my current state, I can't do anything. I'm not satisfied with myself. I can't proudly bear myself as the eldest daughter of the Saegusa Family."

"As the eldest daughter of the Saegusa... is it."

"Yes, for better or for worse, it is my position. I don't want to run away from my responsibility. That's why I'd like to confirm the doubt in my heart. I wonder if this is weird."

"No, I don't think it's weird."

Mayumi's words were both enviable and repulsive to Tatsuya.

Miyuki had not yet been introduced as a direct descendant of the Yotsuba. Instead, she was forced to hide her identity. But, Tatsuya also never thought that being a Yotsuba was a good thing or something to be proud of to begin with, yet to be unable to reveal your true self is a sad situation. These were all Tatsuya's thoughts, instead of feelings.

His sister was forced to hide the pride of her birth. Tatsuya envied Mayumi for her presence, in the light of Miyuki's own existence.

"I see, then what's the connection with me? Even if you ask me to find the culprit, I don't have the 'know-how' to become a detective, nor have I helped in the investigation previously. Unfortunately, I think I can't be of service to you."

However, despite his demeanor, Tatsuya truly wished that he could help her. But it was an impossible task, even for him. He didn't have any means of finding out the whereabouts of the killer whose name was unknown. Even the idea of doing that tired him.

"Wait!"

Despite the frank rejection from Tatsuya, Mayumi stopped him when he was about to leave his seat.

"There's a high chance that the culprit was involved in the Yokohama Incident!"

Those uttered words, made Tatsuya fail to leave the sofa.

"The same culprit as in the Yokohama Incident, you said?"

Tatsuya shouldn't have worn a surprised face.

But what Mayumi thought had little to do with his amazement.

"Seems like Nakura-san had done some research on the mastermind of the Yokohama Incident in Chinatown recently."

She probably thought that she was able to draw Tatsuya's attention. Her reasoning was flawed, since Tatsuya unmistakably had no interest in the topic.

"You're well-informed."

"That person never left my side when on bodyguard duty. Lately, he'd been bringing many souvenirs from Chinatown. I wonder if he was mistaken about my age... I was wondering if Nakura-san wanted to give me hints about the mission, so now I'm intrigued by them."

"I see."

Mayumi might not have realized, but that remark was thought-provoking.

Nakura's employer was Saegusa Kouichi, and his relationship with Mayumi was strictly business-based so he's basically an outsider.

To leave the dirty work to the bodyguard of his eldest daughter, a subordinate that had been trusted to such an extent had left hints to another party about what he had been forced to do.

Seems like Saegusa Kouichi didn't have full control over his subordinate.

Or, in a truer sense, there are no subordinates that could be called loyal confidants of the Saegusa Family.

——This might bring about a bigger meaning in the future.

Tatsuya stopped thinking about the internal conditions of the Saegusa Family.

"It might be as you've said. Nakura-san's work was related to the Chinatown in Yokohama. But to deduce that from such weak evidence, I think there might be a chance that it was completely unrelated to the Yokohama Incident."

At this point Tatsuya thought that he could actually use Mayumi's help for his problem. Even though she didn't possess physical prowess, her combat ability had been proven on the battlefield at Yokohama. Moreover, she is much more mobile as a college student when compared to Miyuki and Minami who were still attending high school.

His objection was intended to cool Mayumi's head. It was possible that Mayumi was influenced by her feelings too much to consider the possibility of her own misconception. If she still insisted in asking for Tatsuya's cooperation based on those conclusions, Tatsuya would have just proceeded from her assumption.

"Well, that might be true…"

Apparently she was thinking about the thing that Tatsuya pointed out. Mayumi timidly took a peek at Tatsuya.

"Then... Tatsuya-kun thinks that ‘the culprit being related to the Yokohama Incident’ was my misunderstanding!?"

But it was only for a few seconds, before Mayumi took a stronger stance against Tatsuya's 'so-what' attitude.

"I didn't mean that."

Tatsuya appeased Mayumi with a fake smile.

"It was only because I'm afraid that your preconception of the truth is being clouded by your strong feelings."

Mayumi puffed up her cheeks... Despite becoming a college student, this expression still had its own deadweight.

"Preconception and perception are two different things."

These glaring words from Mayumi were delivered to Tatsuya's ears just fine. However, Tatsuya chose to treat them as self-monologue. Hence, he paid no further attention to them.

"...I understand such a thing."

However, she returned these words to Tatsuya with firm eyes.

"Do you understand the danger?"

Tatsuya has been waiting for the chance to drop this line.

"Yes. Even so, I still want to do something."

From her answer just now, the uncertain feeling had completely disappeared.

"That's why, Tatsuya. Please lend me your strength."

However, it didn't seem to affect Tatsuya. It was convenient for him if he took up this matter as a response to the strong request of Mayumi’s.

"——I understand."

Mayumi showed a relieved expression with a smile.

Tatsuya was feeling the same, despite not showing it on his face.

"Specifically, what do you want me to do?"

"Tatsuya-kun, are you going to Kyoto for a preliminary inspection with the guard?"

"Yes, this upcoming weekend."

"I'd like to ask for you to accompany me for a while on that day. Let's go to the scene where Nakura-san was killed."

After delivering her last request, Mayumi returned a question.

"Will that suffice?"

Depending on the situation, Tatsuya could spare a little time to accompany her. However, that question was a set up to know her full intention.

"Even I understand, you know…"

Although Tatsuya couldn't care less about others so long as it didn't interfere with his priority, he wouldn't go so far as to ignore others' feelings. It was not a pleasant feeling to see his close friend fall for his words.

"As a daughter of the Saegusa Family, I still don't have the ability to support myself. I have no means to move people regardless of my talent as a magician, I couldn't ask you to do the work of the police by looking for the criminal, either."

Her remarks about her powerless self were right on the spot so Tatsuya didn’t offer a single word of comfort. He was able to retaliate when the No Head Dragon messed with him with the help of the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion. He was able to intervene with the Parasite Doll plan by the help of Kokonoe Yakumo, and the Mobile Suits from the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion.

Which also shows that, by no means was Tatsuya's individual power able to tackle all the problems he had. He never forgot this fact. When he learnt the limit of an individual's power, he couldn't think of any rebuttal.

"Just as Tatsuya-kun said in the beginning. At the end, this is for my own self-satisfaction. It might be foolish to run into danger for such a thing. Yet..."

"Understood."

Tatsuya repeated the same words, blocking Mayumi's words.

"Then, Sunday the 21st. Please select the exact timing and location to fit your schedule."

"…Thanks, Tatsuya-kun."

Mayumi bowed her head low while sitting on the sofa.

"Then, I will email the details for the time and venue tomorrow.

"Can I ask one more thing?"

Mayumi was about to leave her seat when Tatsuya said this.

"Has Nakura-san's body been cremated?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Do you have anything left from what he was wearing at the time he passed away? For example, his clothes."

"The police requested those, since they want to store them as evidence. Furthermore, Nakura-san has no relatives, so I thought it might help to catch the criminal even a little if I handed them over."

"Is it possible to have short access to those materials?"

"…I can try to ask the detective who gave me his contact information."

Tatsuya slightly lowered his head as response to Mayumi's answer.

Because she looked like she had something to say, Tatsuya urged her to speak with his eyes.

"I'm sorry. I didn't think that I would get so sensitive."

"I will cooperate as much as possible, so long as it's possible."

After saying so, Tatsuya stood up in order to prevent Mayumi from repeating her 'thank you' gesture.

During this short period, he had considered that Nakura might have been killed by Zhou. It was not so absurd to hypothesize that Saegusa Kouichi had Nakura Saburou investigate Zhou. And there was even a possibility where the Head of the Saegusa Family had a collusion planned with Zhou.

He did think that Nakura's death was connected to Zhou Gongjin so there might be a lead to his whereabouts there. Therefore, he did not need Mayumi's words of gratitude.

After sending Mayumi up to the gate, Tatsuya went to the Student Council room.

For some reason, the current Public Morals Committee Chief was there with the Student Council Officers, there was even the presence of the previous Club Leader.

"Onii-sama, thank you for your hard work."

"Ah, sorry for my tardiness."

Miyuki rose and gave him a hand gesture to sit with a smile, before Tatsuya headed to his desk. He noticed the edgy stares on him, and chose not to react to them.

"Shiba-senpai."

The one who started the conversation was Izumi, who had been fighting to face her terminal right after Tatsuya entered the Student Council room.

"Do you have anything you want to ask?"

On the surface, Tatsuya's question was very reasonable and superficial. In fact, the expected dialogue was most probably started because she wanted to know what had happened in the meeting just now.

"That's not it!"

And there was nothing going out of his prediction.

"Onee-sama, no, has my sister gone back?"

"She has. Did you perhaps have something for her?"

"No, that's not the case. But, that, I just wonder what kind of business forced my sister to take up your valuable time."

The meaning behind Izumi's words was clear as day. She wanted to know what kind of a conversation her sister just had with Tatsuya.

"Please don't let it bother you. There's no need for you to worry."

However, Tatsuya played with his opponent, by avoiding the expected focus of the conversation.

"I'm not worrying about Senpai!"

As a result, Izumi retorted back frantically. Then, she blushed after receiving smiles from the upperclassmen, as per the usual pattern.

The one who helped take over the matter from the dismayed and red-faced Izumi was Miyuki. She unmistakably did so while taking a peek at her brother; she was curious about the closed meeting between Tatsuya and Mayumi. No, it would be better to say that she was the one who wanted to know the most.

"Then, Onii-sama. What did you talk about with Saegusa-senpai? I hope you don't mind sharing it with us?"

Immediately after Miyuki asked so, there were signs of people preparing to hear the answer. Tatsuya looked around the room; nobody in the room diverted their eyes while waiting for his answer.

"It seems like Senpai also has a matter to settle in Kyoto."

At the same time, Izumi's body was trembling. Her head was down, so her expression couldn't be seen, but Tatsuya could easily guess that she was thinking about Nakura. However, he decided that it would be counterproductive to voice some comfort for Izumi here. Hence, he continued with his words, while pretending that he did not notice anything.

"She said that she'd like to accompany us in the preliminary inspection. I denied her request after she refused to explain the reason behind it, but she had a comparatively serious face on her."

Hattori sighed a little after hearing Tatsuya conclude his answer. He must have been having the same concern.

However, he was not letting Tatsuya off the hook; he took up a harsh tone towards Tatsuya.

"Shiba, why did you deny her request when you don't have any urgent errands? The preliminary security inspection is only to look around to see the state of the city, right? You should be able to make some time for her that wouldn't hinder your activities."

Tatsuya had assumed that this question would arise. Honestly, he thought that a good young man would have a hard time accompanying her. Not that he meant to ridicule her, rather he was saying that out of favor. He tightened his lips consciously to refrain himself from saying so.

However, another person followed up in blaming him.

"Tatsuya-san, I also think so."

Hattori's response was in line with Tatsuya's plan, but it was unexpected for Honoka to agree with Hattori.

"Although she had Ichihara-senpai and Juumonji-senpai at Magic University, she purposely chose to come to First High. Doesn't that show how much she relies on you?"

Without knowing what the reason behind Honoka's words was, Tatsuya couldn't reply immediately.

There was no merit for Honoka if Tatsuya and Mayumi were to meet up in Kyoto. Even if Miyuki was jealous of others, Mayumi might still try to use the chance, since Miyuki was his real sister. She should have discerned that Minami was also taking a step back from Tatsuya as usual.

Chances were——while it might be rude to Honoka——she might be purely feeling sympathy for Mayumi.

"Tatsuya, wouldn't it be fine if you spare some time for her?"

"…That's right."

Even Mikihiko made that suggestion. Tatsuya could no longer act that he was not doing something bad. Even Mikihiko didn't know that the true purpose of the trip was to arrest Zhou

Gongjin, he was only told that there was a certain 'Traditionalist' group in Kyoto who conspired to make more trouble. He still acted as if he was stubbornly against Mayumi's cooperation request and gave off the feeling of being forced to do it, despite the real situation he was facing.

Moreover, this development was also convenient for Tatsuya. They had just given him a valid reason to spend time with Mayumi, so there was no need to disguise their meeting as coincidence.

In reality, Tatsuya didn’t expect for her to be very useful. However, even the addition of a single person was better for manpower. Tatsuya believed that the request he received was not only to search for Zhou Gongjin, but also to take care of him once he's found. However, the content of Maya's request was 'cooperation for capture'; if he couldn't locate him first, there was no way to capture him. To do so, it was necessary to act like he was looking for Zhou. That was why he gathered a lot of people.

"I shall apologize first, although it would be a little awkward for me to contact Senpai. Izumi, do you mind if I contact her?"

"Why do you ask me such a thing?"

Izumi asked with an annoyed voice. She was alarmed by that question as Tatsuya treated her like she had a sister complex.

"Izumi is Saegusa-senpai's sibling after all."

However, even for Tatsuya, it was not possible to act that cold towards an underclassman girl.

"You don't need my permission. Please act as per your discretion."

Izumi replied to Tatsuya with a cute face, despite receiving such an uncute remark from Tatsuya.

◊ ◊ ◊

Near the border of the former Nagano Prefecture and Yamanashi Prefecture, a nameless village exists in a narrow valley surrounded by the mountains. This village which has never been listed on the map is the home of the infamous Yotsuba Family.

In the center of the village, there is a conspicuously large single-story Manor of the Yotsuba. In the main room within the house, Yotsuba Maya, the head of the family received a report from her butler, Hayama.

"...Seems like all the facts are pointing to Nara."

"The JSDF Intelligence Bureau..."

Mockery floated from the shiny red lips of Maya. It was not too vulgar; instead her expression was rather noble.

"I have also searched for the department that did the intervention in the investigation report, in case they're being an obstacle."

"I don't mind. The JSDF has their own problems, right? The issue is almost settled, so I'll turn a blind eye."

The old butler bowed reverently as an exaggeration. In Maya's eyes, the JSDF was a huge underdog, Hayama had no doubt about this.

"More importantly, about Tatsuya-san."

Maya's interest immediately shifted from the JSDF. Since they were talking about Tatsuya originally, it was natural to get back to the topic.

"He should be working really hard at this moment, right?"

"Yes. Particularly due to the secret development of the new magic, I couldn't think of any other possibility."

"New magic... Is it going to be a short-range physical attack, or should we make another guess?"

"If you don't mind my conjecture."

"I don't mind hearing what you have in mind, Hayama-san."

Maya did not hide her curiosity, and asked Hayama.

It is not rare for Maya to leave the negotiations to her subordinate but that's the way it goes in this family. However, she doesn't just idly spend spare time every day. She also certainly does not indulge in game sprees. As one of the Yotsuba, the most important challenge is magic improvement. Hence, she spent a great deal of time in researching magic.

For her, the rumors that Tatsuya is developing a new magic, is a story that intrigued her curiosity.

"If he derived the new magic from Angie Sirius' Brionac, and judging from the name he gave to the new magic 'Baryon Lance', it seems to be a magic that emits canon particles by decomposing the substance to proton-neutron levels."

"I wonder if it's a chargeable particle cannon."

"If that's the case, it's not a new magic but a reproduction of Brionac, Tatsuya-dono must have known that. Though there is still a high possibility of a neutron-based cannon."

"A neutron gun… Neutron barrier is already seen as magic in the realm of perfection, Tatsuya-san has surely taken this fact into account as well."

Maya who has been enjoying her time making such conjectures, suddenly showed a worried face.

"…'Baryon Lance'. It's neither a 'Launcher', nor a 'Cannon', not even a 'Gun', I wonder why it is a 'Lance'?”

Hayama was also curious about that part, but it seems like the answer had been decided before the question was asked.

"I don't know to such an extent. But he said that he would show the new magic when he visits during the New Year’s Meeting."

Perceiving that there's not much left to be said, Maya wisely preferred to observe rather than over speculate. However, the bad impression still lasted, and made her throw a spiteful question.

"Why didn't I ask for more details? I wonder if that child is really obedient, so I thought that testing him would be a good idea."

"With all due respect, in order to achieve your purpose, you don't need to make sure to such an extent."

This, however, might have a boomerang effect for Maya. At Hayama's word, Maya shrugged in a barely visible gesture.

"I never thought that much in relation to that purpose."

Seeing Hayama's eyes fixed on her, Maya felt that there was a need for a valid excuse.

"It isn’t because he's my nephew. If I were to reject that child, it wouldn't be profitable for the Yotsuba."

"I think the reason of being your nephew is fine."

"Hayama-san."

"Pardon my rudeness."

At Maya's call to own up to his mistake, Hayama reverently bowed. However, it was not for an apology. If that was the case, he would have used phrases like 'I've said too much' or 'please forgive my insolence'.

Since Hayama did not retract his statement by saying it was 'insolence', as a result, Maya faintly blushed at his statement.

"Hayama-san."

Hayama had resigned from Maya's room, and was about to go to his residence, and in the middle of the garden, he heard a voice from behind.

His presence couldn't be felt, there was no unbalance. In this village, it was not unusual for one to have a skill such as assimilating their presence in the wind and even the darkness.

Besides, the voice which called from behind was familiar for Hayama.

"Kuroba-sama. Pardon me for not noticing your presence."

At the very least, he felt obliged to say this much in sarcasm.

The defeated Kuroba Mitsugu wore an uncomfortable face, of course, he was not angered by this much of sarcasm.

"No, I was rude too for not unmasking my presence."

Hayama didn't care whether Mitsugu's words were truth or lie. It was highly likely because his profession devoted him to be in the shadows, on the other hand, he thought that it was also possible that he was extremely used to the state of stealth on every work-related occasion.

"No, please don't be concerned with such a trivial thing."

However, it was a good thing, regardless of the situation. If Kuroba Mitsugu seriously hid his presence, even Hayama couldn't discern him by his eyes. He was also not provoked by the fact that Mitsugu's ability was excellent and he was able at his job. Moreover, the Kuroba Family is one of the strongest branches of the Yotsuba. So long as they're loyal to the head, Hayama should still serve them. If he couldn't withstand the master's whims, he would have been disqualified as a butler.

"And, Kuroba-sama. To what do I owe this patronage?"

"Well, I have something in mind, but... I want to talk to you for a while."

Hayama raised his eyebrow. He showed a somewhat discomfited face, but it was a deliberate emotional expression.

"Do you want to talk... about that?"

Hayama smiled politely.

Mitsugu hurriedly shook his hands in denial.

"No, no, please take the words at face value. I'd like to ask about something that I need your consultation in."

"Oh, dear, please forgive my rudeness."

Hayama carefully bowed in the darkness. It was as if there wasn't a hint of hesitation.

"Then, this way please."

Hayama led Mitsugu to the Main House, from where he had just left. As a butler of the Yotsuba Family, he had been given the discretion to use the waiting room of the Main House quite freely. Otherwise, he could always claim that the Head of the Kuroba family was using the room; there shouldn't be any complaints for him when doing so. If they were about to continue their conversation, they could always confirm later.

However, Mitsugu did not follow Hayama's lead.

"No, if Hayama-san doesn't mind, we can talk here."

Hayama halted his step and turned back, to direct a quizzical gaze to Mitsugu.

Mitsugu was ignoring the fact that he was acting suspiciously.

"Hayama-san, you have been talking with the Head about that man——aren't you worried about Zhou Gongjin?"

Hearing Mitsugu's words, Hayama nodded with a sense of revelation.

"It's natural to be curious about a job that was left to your care."

"Ah, no…”

At his own words being distorted into the worst meaning, Mitsugu hurriedly followed up with a rebuttal.

"However, please don't worry."

But, Hayama did not spare him any chance.

"I'm sure you've heard that, Miyuki-sama's guardian has been requested to take care of this issue in your stead."

Mitsugu frowned deeply.

"I know."

He knew the fact that Tatsuya was going to handle the matter long before his children visited him in September. It all started on that day in August. Mitsugu had seen Tatsuya's abominable prowess. Certainly, he felt some level of gratitude that he would not be one-armed, but that his pride was deeply damaged was also a fact.

"I was just giving the progress report. I wonder if it's why Miyuki is the likely candidate for the next head position. That way, we eliminate the possibility of him revolting against the Yotsuba. All of these things must be identified for the future of the Yotsuba Family."

Mitsugu revealed increasing discomfort, Hayama acted like he didn’t catch that.

"It is extremely important, though I know it is disrespectful towards Kuroba-sama, I was allowed to use this matter to determine his loyalty."

"That man can't possibly have any loyalty towards the Yotsuba Family."

Mitsugu threw out those words in spite. Both his words and expression, had never been shown in front of Miyuki and Tatsuya.

"Kuroba-sama, I have no idea of what you have in mind for such assertiveness, but..."

Hayama sought for permission to continue with his eyes.

But, Mitsugu silenced him with a gaze instead.

Hayama chose to ignore that and spun his answer in a tone that was aloof. Perhaps, no other man was able to utter such harsh words.

"Is the reason you distrust Tatsuya-dono related to the possibility of him finding out that the family tried to kill him as soon as he was born?"

"Hayama!"

Mitsugu threw off his politeness towards Hayama.

That action was initiated by the people in Mitsugu's generation. Besides the seven families affiliated to Yotsuba: 'Shiiba', 'Mashiba', 'Shibata', 'Kuroba', 'Mugura', 'Tsukuba' and 'Shizuka'; only Hayama knows about this fact. Even those who inherited the blood of the Yotsuba who are less than 20 years old have never been informed. Therefore, Kuroba Mitsugu lost his composure involuntarily.

Hayama expelled the killing intent that was directed at him with a polite smile.

"That way, he would be tamed and loyal to the Yotsuba Family, and I'm sure you know that this will be needed for the future. Although there were times when my lady didn't realize this. That's why she left the rest to Miyuki-sama's care."

Mitsugu clenched his hand and grit the back of his teeth.

Mitsugu started the conversation to explore such a possibility, but inevitably, it has changed into condemnation from Hayama.

"Kuroba-sama. Your worries are unwarranted. Only real action has meaning. Even if you pretend to obey, and you planned to betray secretly, if in the end, you were not able to betray, the result is the same and is more profitable. A tool does not need to be loyal. For a weapon, there's no need to have a heart."

"Bastard, do you think of magicians as weapons...!?"

"You might be forgetting the fact that I'm also a magician."

He's also quite able compared to the other servants, thus, Hayama laughed casually.

Mitsugu was trapped in heavy silence.

"A weapon doesn’t hold any fear. A weapon doesn’t feel any anxiety. However, for one to kill an innocent person just because of the fear of their potential, perhaps the one whose heart has become a weapon was really a better person."

Those words wedged deeply into Mitsugu's mind. Hayama bowed and left the scene.

◊ ◊ ◊

Friday, October 19th, 10 days before this year's Thesis Competition. Today, the preparations for the presentation finally reached its last stage.

This year, there were no suspicious activities on the school grounds, unlike last year. Last year was an exception, it can be said that this year's procedures were normal. Therefore, there was no need of extra manpower and the work was still able to progress towards completion as expected.

Tatsuya and company were also kept in peace. Perhaps, due to the hard work of Yakumo's disciples, or maybe through the undercover mercenary troops that were arranged by Butler Hanabishi. Hanabishi was the number two servant of the Yotsuba; he was responsible for various arrangements involving the underground business of the Yotsuba Family——in other words, the butler in charge——including the arrangements of required personnel. He should not have made any mistakes in his work.

The magicians in the Yotsuba Family were actually not many in number. Even not limiting it to only magicians related by blood to the Yotsuba compared to the other 10MC Families like the Saegusa or even Ichijou the number of magicians they could deploy was indeed 'small'.

Although the number of Yotsuba Magicians was small, they won in terms of ability, these results had been proven. However, there were times where numbers were important, for such cases the Yotsuba had an organized network of disposable outsiders to collaborate with them.

The Yotsuba Family was often asked to purge those who conspired against the nation. To capture rebel organizations or magicians that worked towards that goal. It didn't mean taking action only on magicians that took direct hostile action against the nation, so long as a magician was aiding a foreign military force with the intent to harm this nation it was enough.

This work had become an important source of income for the Yotsuba Family. Not just financially, Yotsuba's combatants had been trained through this work as well. It was also a means to brainwash the captured rebellious magicians.

The No Head Dragon was using 'Generators' without the consent of the magician. However, the Yotsuba knew very well that consciousness and emotion had a direct link to the power of magic.

They did classic brainwashing to their enemies. Earnestly imprinting the fear of death for defying the Yotsuba. An ideology of fear. In other words, those who weren't afraid of death couldn't be affected by this magic. Then, the Yotsuba would offer a deal to those who feared death, 'Depending on your work, we'll let you free."

Then, those mercenary magician troops undertook missions in order to get their lives as a reward, being used by the Yotsuba in a variety of jobs. The escort mission this time was to latch onto magicians that showed unusual activity and to conduct a thorough search. It was work that required a number of people as indicated by the Yotsuba putting the stock of brainwashed magicians to use. Thanks to those arrangements, Tatsuya's friends and even First High itself was completely undisturbed.

Even with the pretext of being busy with work for the Thesis Competition the girls couldn't afford to remain in school until late at night. Although it seemed to be gender discrimination between men and women, only the boys were permitted to stay and work until night after the gates closed.

It was soon time for the gates to close today as well and the Student Council members had begun to clean up. However, since they weren’t using paper now in terms of returning the documents into the cabinet the 'cleaning up' process was quite different when compared to one hundred years ago. There was less movement and no rush or noise involved in the process and it could be done almost immediately.

"…Miyuki-senpai, I will excuse myself now."

Tomorrow is Saturday, Miyuki will be going to Kyoto and be absent from school. She had applied for extension time from school to prepare things for the Student Council who will be covering her work tomorrow. That was why Izumi went out first.

"Izumi-chan, I'm counting on you for tomorrow and the day after."

"It’s an honor. I'll do it to the best of my ability!"

Izumi had been fidgeting by the door before answering back in high-spirits due to Miyuki’s reply.

"Seems like Miyuki has grown accustomed to handling Izumi-chan."

Honoka stood up from her terminal and gave a wry smile.

"You have talent to be a wicked woman."

Shizuku who came to the Student Council room to go back with Honoka capitalized this chance. It was a phrase that she couldn’t say if she was to be objective but since Miyuki knew there was no malice she only retorted with a laugh.

"There's no such thing as wicked or virtuous if the opponent is a girl, right?"

"…Miyuki, you're cold."

Even though Shizuku tried to sigh earnestly, Miyuki did not laugh.

Shizuku's role in this year’s Thesis Competition was to escort the main presenter Azusa, but Honoka tagged along even now. From the station onwards, it was just the two of them but they were with Azusa up to the station. No, actually, there were bodyguards watching them from behind, however they tried to keep out of Shizuku's and Honoka's sight. At the very least, she was alone with Honoka in the individual train compartment.

"Hey, Shizuku."

While waiting in line for the individual compartment train, Honoka spoke to Shizuku with her head down.

"What."

However, Shizuku had no idea what Honoka was concerned about. A two-seater vehicle stopped in front of them, while Shizuku was staring at Honoka with a puzzled and curious expression.

They boarded the train after lightly bowing to the three people beside them who had waited for a four-seater vehicle. Honoka asked again, when Shizuku was specifying the path to their destination.

"Umm… I wonder if it's ok."

"What is?"

"Well, Nakajo-senpai's escort…"

"Ah, about that."

Shizuku relaxed her shoulders with a 'that's it?' expression.

"I was told by Nakajou-senpai."

"That she's going to be escorted only by Chikura-senpai?"

Since they're best friends, Shizuku added in the part that was omitted by Honoka herself.

"Is it better to have someone from the same grade as a guard after all?"

"Yeah… I can understand what you mean. There are also some underclassmen that don't act reserved around her too."

"Kazumi and Izumi are exceptions though."

"Ah, well... I feel that even Minami-chan has some kind of a wall around her."

"Well."

Shizuku showed her agreement to Honoka with that word. Originally, she was the one who argued that it was easier to connect with the students from the same grade, so it was an expected response from her.

"And, I'm sure she'll be ok with Chikura-senpai."

"Hmm? Ah, because Chikura-senpai's magic is suitable for being a guard."

"Yup."

After suddenly being told that it would be fine, Honoka couldn't say anything more. As expected of a best friend, with the little hints that Shizuku gave to her, she was able to find out the meaning behind those words.

Chikura Asako's magic specialty was 'Vector Inversion'. As long as the original direction of the shot was known in advance, it was possible for her to intercept and repel objects such as rifle bullets. The problem of being caught by surprise was not exclusive to Asako and something most magicians struggled with. It was very powerful when being aimed at by guns.

Moreover, her magic was not exclusively for deterring projectiles. In the case of a human opponent, it also repelled momentum. It was very useful against masses with high speed as long as it didn’t exceed 200 km/h.

As Honoka said, Chikura Asako has one of the most suitable magic properties as a guard among the First High escort members.

"Anyway, are you ok, Honoka?"

"Eh… about what?"

Shizuku stared at Honoka who answered with such a naïve face.

A message was projected onto the window, alerting that they were about to reach the station.

Shizuku said 'we'll continue later', and faced forward.

Shizuku resumed the topic, while taking a bath after the meal.

"Honoka, are you ok?"

"Eh, did you say something? Wait a minute."

Honoka was washing her hair, and turned her head towards the hot bath where Shizuku was immersing herself.

"Never mind, come here after you're done with your hair."

"Wait, just a bit more."

Honoka rinsed her hair again from the shampoo, before taking out a towel from the storage rack covered with tarpaulin. She wiped her hair to absorb the moisture, put the wet towel in the laundry bag, and turned to get a bottle of conditioner.

"Should I do it for you?"

"No, I'm fine. If I asked you to do this, you'd do it carefully, and end up taking too much time."

"Isn't it ok? Let me do it."

Shizuku got out of the bathtub. Hot water was dripping off her as she pushed to seize the rinse bottle from Honoka.

"Honoka, your hair is so straight and beautiful. How envious."

Shizuku sighed while stroking Honoka's wet hair.

"It's nothing much… compared to Miyuki."

She was stating the obvious praise, before facing down due to embarrassment.

"There's no point in comparing with Miyuki."

Against Shizuku’s serious rebuttal, she awkwardly laughed with the expression of 'well, you have a point'.

Shizuku opened Honoka's banded hair, and gently rinsed it.

"Anyway, I prefer Honoka's hair."

"Eehh!? That's just favoritism, rather, you’re just too biased towards your friend."

However, Shizuku’s next reply astounded Honoka; Shizuku said 'it's natural to be biased since we're friends'.

"Moreover, Miyuki's hair color is too heavy for my taste."

In contrast, Shizuku showed an uncommon eloquence.

"I prefer Honoka's bright colored hair."

"I-I see… Thanks."

Honoka said the last word with a small voice, barely reaching Shizuku's ears.

For a moment, Shizuku applied conditioner to Honoka's hair in silence, Honoka also entrusted her hair to Shizuku in silence.

Shizuku took the showerhead into her hands.

Honoka closed her eyes.

Shizuku evenly showered Honoka's hair with hot water and the conditioner was rinsed away by the water pressure.

Shizuku resumed the earlier topic from the bathtub and it was after she finished washing Honoka's hair, as she promised.

Honoka and Shizuku entered the bathtub face to face. The bathroom in Shizuku's house was spacious; the room itself was about twice as large as in a general household despite not being the main bathroom. The bathtub also corresponded in size; it could comfortably fit two people together.

"Honoka."

"Yeah?"

"Are you alright?"

"Eh, about what? You were asking the same thing earlier…"

Shizuku stared at Honoka's face again from the water’s surface.

Apparently, Honoka was trying to play dumb, at any rate, Shizuku was determined and dropped the question again.

"Are you fine with staying back in Tokyo? Don't you want to join the trip to Kyoto?"

Honoka froze and gasped.

The temperature of the hot water had not changed. However, Honoka's body and face were frigid, as if the temperature had dropped.

"That's…"

"Sorry, I was insensitive."

Shizuku looked away from Honoka who had gone pale even on the lips.

"…It's ok. Shizuku, you have been cheering for me after all, I think it's natural for you to wonder."

After saying, 'wait a minute', Honoka took a series of deep breaths. She regained her composure along with the complexion of her face.

"Fuu… Shizuku, I'm fine now. Look here?"

Urged by Honoka, Shizuku returned her line of sight. They were facing each other once again.

"Truthfully, I wanted to go to Kyoto together with Tatsuya-san. It doesn't even need to be the two of us exclusively. I don't even mind if we go together with Miyuki. As long as I can be with him, it's good enough."

"…Then, why?"

"I don't want to be a hindrance."

Shizuku stared at Honoka, after hearing the unexpected answer.

Honoka smiled powerlessly with a lonely look.

"Shizuku too must have realized, right? Tatsuya even instructed me not to come to the Thesis Competition and stay in Shizuku's house instead."

A light of understanding showed up in Shizuku's eyes.

"Tatsuya was really worried about us too. Anyone who aims for the Thesis Competition materials couldn't be just a petty thief, he must be quite an opponent. Like last year, I think they were quite a formidable opponent."

"Honoka, do you think that Tatsuya-san is making his move due to a mission?"

Shizuku dropped both of her shoulders, before embracing them while trembling.

Honoka waded through the hot bath and settled beside Shizuku.

Thus, the both of them sat side by side, even though the space in the bathtub allowed them to do so it was still cramped after all.

Their bodies were in close contact with each other, Honoka held Shizuku by the shoulders.

Shizuku lowered her hands, which had been clamping on her own shoulders.

"Yup… I think Tatsuya is on a mission for the JSDF. Moreover, I think the opponent is a formidable large-scale organization. There are possibilities that we could be taken as hostages too."

"Is that why he requested you to be protected by a bodyguard?"

"It's not just us. The fact that I was made an escort was because Shizuku is also a possible target, together with me. Mizuki is protected by Yoshida-kun for the same reason. Since Yoshida-kun's skill is on a professional level."

"That's a side benefit."

"Right."

The two of them laughed while taking off their bath towels.

However, Honoka's laughter soon stopped.

By the time that Honoka had lost her laughter, Shizuku had also stopped laughing.

"Even for this Kyoto trip, I'm sure that the preliminary security inspection is only a practicality. He must have a separate goal in mind. It's also possible that it's going to be rough. After all, the ones asked to join for the trip are experts in combat. Even Minami-chan has her barrier magic that would be very useful in an emergency."

"I think you're quite skilled yourself."

"No, I'm useless. I can only help from a distance, if it's a close-range attack I would only be a hindrance to Tatsuya…"

Speaking strictly on a general magician level, Honoka's combat power was not low. It could even be said that she was one of the top on a high school level. However, when compared to Miyuki or Tatsuya whose combat ability ranked as first-class or even higher among military magicians, even Shizuku as her close friend couldn't offer words of consolation.

"That's why, its fine."

Honoka felt uncomfortable looking at her best friend casting her head down in silence.

Honoka embraced the top half of Shizuku’s face that was above the hot water, to her chest.

"Fu-Onoka, can- brea-"

"Hyaa!?"

Honoka released Shizuku's head with a scream.

After Shizuku was freed, she took a deep breath with her nose and mouth.

She didn't stare at Honoka's bitter face but at her chest instead.

"So-sorry!"

Honoka stuck out her hand on top of the water while apologizing.

The two of them let out a 'pu' sound at the same time.

The awkwardness vanished into thin air instantly.

"Shizuku, I'm sorry."

"It's ok, I'm sorry too."

"No, Shizuku, you were thinking about my feelings. So you don't need to say sorry."

Honoka said so with a carefree smile.

"Honestly, I really want to go to Kyoto. Yet, I don't want to be a hindrance for everyone. That's why, I'll properly stay back in Tokyo this time. I did think that Tatsuya-san doesn’t want me to realize this, so I pretend. I'm staying back here, just as he wanted me to."

Shizuku smiled warmly towards Honoka's words.

"Honoka, you're a good girl."

Honoka's calmness crumbled in the blink of an eye.

"Wha-what are you saying!?"

"If I was a boy, I wouldn't leave Honoka alone."

"Umm… Shizuku-san!? Your eyes look dangerous now!?"

"You have good style… You also look approachable and cute."

Shizuku's thin, slick fingers stroked Honoka's jaw.

"Shi, Shizuku!? Somehow you are acting like Eimi!?"

"Hmph. I have a bigger chest than Eimi."

"That's not the point!"

"Do you mean that the difference is negligible when compared to yours?"

"I said no such thing!"

"Show it to me."

"Kyaaa!"

"…I knew this, but this is absurd."

"Wai-, Shizuku, please, sto-"

It was hard to record in detail what happened this time. The only thing known was that they had both gotten their heads very hot in the bath.

Chapter 7

Saturday morning, October 20th.

The arts school still held on to the five days system, but the six-day systems are more commonly used in high schools nowadays. Certainly, magic high school conducts the curriculum from Monday to Saturday.

Unlike their usual routine of going to school and facing the terminal in the classroom, Tatsuya was going to Kyoto with Miyuki and Minami.

They didn't skip school. It was a public holiday. This time, under the cover of preparing for the Thesis Competition they were going by trailer rather than the express train.

Simply put, a trailer is a two-story combination train, with cabinets for passengers at the first floor and amenities space on the second floor. Speed-wise, it wasn’t a lot inferior to the express train, since it was powered by linear motors.

The wheels were made of metal, running on a metal rail. It leaves a sense of "railway" when compared to an express train or an individual compartment train.

Before the ride, the individual type train was parked in the trailer by a parking mechanism. As the Individual compartment train has a higher speed than the trailer, it approaches the trailer from behind. The mechanism then scoops up the compartment from behind. The mechanism itself was housed inside the trailer and attached by a slider. Thus, the passengers from each individual compartment train were able to board the trailer for longer, inter-city rides. It was possible to have such a system as the wheels of individual compartment trains were only for support and not attached to the vehicle body.

Tatsuya and company boarded the trailer and immediately after, headed to the amenities space of the second story. The first floor seemed to be a waste because even though it was excellent for privacy there was very little space to stretch out.

Fortunately, the relax chair was vacant. Tatsuya and Miyuki sat side by side, and Minami sat opposite Miyuki after she rotated the seat in front of her.

"Do you want something to drink?"

Tatsuya pulled out the order terminal from the armrest and asked Miyuki while showing the screen her.

“...Sorry to trouble you, Onii-sama. I'll go with this."

While Tatsuya excused himself to place the orders, Miyuki operated the terminal by herself. Tatsuya also tried showing the screen to Minami, but Minami had already taken out the terminal from her seat. It was as if she was declaring that 'I'd rather have my own than Tatsuya's', Tatsuya returned back to his terminal with a laugh. Minami got a little annoyed when she saw that, while dispensing her order.

The drinks arrived in less than a minute. A robotic arm that had been moving through the ceiling lowered the tray for the three of them. This is the same type of mechanism that is used in ordinary households, HAR (Home Automation Robot).

Reusable resin cups were handed over to Tatsuya, Miyuki, and Minami in that order, before the arm returned back to the ceiling. The three of them had a mouthful to moisten their throats and then put the cups on their side table.

It was immediately after, that a voice called Tatsuya from behind.

"Huh? Tatsuya-kun?"

Tatsuya and company put down their cups, because they were aware that she was approaching them.

"Morning, Erika."

The one who greeted her was Miyuki.

"I didn't expect you to be in this trailer as well."

Erika sat down in front of Tatsuya, and Tatsuya continued the conversation.

"What a great coincidence."

Erika nodded while showing a little surprise. Intra-city trailers ran at regular intervals, those who were traveling for long distances often got placed in the closest trailers. The control is done by a traffic control system, so the passengers who ride the trailer have no say in choosing.

However, it is not such a surprising situation. If they have the same destination and the same estimated time of arrival they'll always be merged into the same trailer, thus, the possibility of getting into the same vehicle was quite high. Erika boarded from a trailer soon after Tatsuya and company hence, there was a high probability that they would meet inside.

Following Tatsuya and company, Erika also ordered a drink and had a big stretch in the relax chair.

"Yup, as expected, it's nice to be able to stretch my limbs."

"Do you feel it's cramped in the narrow compartment train?"

Although there were individual cabin trains that were made according to body size, there were people who would still feel the narrowness. Miyuki assessed from Erika's attitude that she was that type.

"Hmm? It's not like that. I've also been disciplined to sit in a narrow room for hours."

"So there's such a discipline in swordsmanship."

Surprisingly, Miyuki's amazement was met with a bitter frown from Erika.

"That shitty father forced me to do it as a part of swordsmanship training."

Tatsuya and Miyuki exchanged a glance at the choice of words of the young lady in front of them. Erika might be seemingly boisterous, but she was actually brought up as a respectable lady. Putting aside the ’baka aniki’ name-calling of her brother, she shouldn't have used bad words such as 'shitty father'.

"So it wasn't an art of the sword?"

She eventually made eye contact due to her curiosity, and saw that Erika wasn’t in the mood to answer the question. Both of them alike, do not want anyone to find out about their family situation.

Therefore, Miyuki asked this instead. From Erika's words, she concluded that it must be some form of a 'lesson'. She felt that it was befitting of Erika rather than the opposite.

"It’s a tea ceremony.”

If one thought about it, Miyuki's amazement was a fitting expression in response to Erika's answer.

"I think it’s not so rare to combine tea ceremony and martial arts."

However, Tatsuya followed up a split second later, making Erika fail to notice that Miyuki was speechlessly surprised.

"Well. I'm pretty sure my father needed it as a head of the family, but I don't think he needed to force his children right?"

"Well, you're not wrong either."

"But I think you were too harsh, Erika."

The rebooted Miyuki came to interrupt with a smile.

"The tea ceremony disciples are mostly girls. Wouldn't it be hard on your brother too?"

"On the other hand, I think it's not weird for Erika to do a tea ceremony."

At Tatsuya's new comment, Erika shifted her eyes.

"Eh, I wonder. Don't you feel uncomfortable with me handling tea?"

"There's no way that could be true. I've been invited to Miyuki's class twice, I think the atmosphere suits Erika well."

"I'm sure Miyuki wouldn't think that..."

A smile that slipped from Erika's lips while she was facing away, made Tatsuya leak a giggle. It was obvious that she was hiding her embarrassment while pretending to sulk.

When they arrived at Kyoto Station, Leo and Mikihiko had been waiting for them in the ticket lounge. As expected, it wasn’t by chance that the two of them took the same trailer. They knew that Erika was going to take the trailer, and chose to take the individual compartment train.

There were six people meeting up at Kyoto Station and they immediately started proceeding to the hotel. However, as they started walking, Tatsuya halted and looked back, sensing the presence of someone he knew closing in.

"Tatsuya-san, Miyuki-san, Minami-san."

"Ara, Minoru-kun?"

He was rapidly approaching them when Miyuki called him, she met him two weeks ago. The youngest of the Kudou Family, Kudou Minoru.

Tatsuya and company realized, and he also probably realized. His name was being called without hesitation and his face was brimming with a smile.

There was amazement coming from Tatsuya's right side. At a glance, Erika's eyes were wide open and in a round shape. Even her mouth was a little open; she must have been quite surprised.

"How surprising."

While thinking that, words of admittance flew out.

"He looks like a boy version of Miyuki... I never thought that there'd be anyone else with this kind of a perfect face besides Miyuki."

Tatsuya consented to her opinion, but it was not a comment to be made in the presence of the specified person.

"Minoru, did you come to fetch us? Didn't we plan for you to wait at the hotel?"

"Yes, that was the plan but it doesn't take much time to get here, so I decided to come over."

Thank goodness we didn't miss him that would honestly only turn into a bitter situation, Tatsuya decided to keep this in his own heart.

Instead, he chose to introduce him to the others who were still not acquainted with Minoru.

"This is your first time meeting them right?"

By them, he was referring to his friends who were lining up to his right. Miyuki was on his left side, while Minami was behind him.

"This is the Kudou Family’s son, Kudou Minoru."

"Nice to meet you. I'm a freshman from Second High, Kudou Minoru."

After Tatsuya's words, Minoru introduced himself. Not as a member of the 'Kudou Family', but as a common 'High School Freshman'. He chose to be a high school student rather than a member of the 10MC.

"I'm a sophomore at First High, Chiba Erika. Nice to meet you."

Erika quick to reign in her shock was the first one to introduce herself.

"I'm Saijou Leonhart. Also a sophomore at First High."

"Yoshida Mikihiko. I'm a sophomore at First High as well. Nice to meet you, Kudou-kun."

"Nice to meet you too."

Minoru’s eyebrows moved slightly when hearing Erika’s and Mikihiko's name, he must have realized that they were the descendants of Chiba swordsmen and Yoshida spell users. He doesn't seem to have good enough interpersonal skills to hide what’s on his mind, even with his outlandish talent in magic.

"Well, we only have a small age gap."

"Minoru. We're going to put down our luggage at the hotel first, do you want to tag along?"

"Yes, please let me do so. We can use the time to talk about something."

"That's right."

Tatsuya turned his steps towards the commuter landing again. Miyuki was by his side, and his friends followed behind. Both Minoru and Minami also followed Tatsuya.

Despite it being a little early to check in, the luggage could be deposited at the hotel without a problem. This practice has not changed from the old days.

The seven people in Tatsuya's group, including Minoru, initially headed towards the new Kyoto International Convention Hall, which was the venue for the Thesis Competition. It was rebuilt from a facility called, Kyoto International Conference Center that existed before the war. However, it was renamed as the New International Convention Center, two decades after the war ended.

It was a natural location that was originally surrounded by lakes and mountains, and it hasn't changed even after the rebuilding process. Construction of such large-scale commerce facilities was virtually banned, also farther away there was a small stadium that had been demolished due to its old age and was changed into a large park.

As opposed to the terrain in the Yokohama Incident last year, with the exception of one hotel adjacent to the Convention Center, there were no high-rise buildings that foreigners could sabotage in the vicinity of the New International Convention Center. Houses in the surrounding area were mostly two-stories high. It's highly unlikely that a large number of people could hide in the vicinity without being discovered.

"…But on the other hand, it was easier for a few people to hide here."

"Is it? I think homeless people wouldn't hide at a mountain though."

Erika raised a question to Mikihiko's opinion.

"It doesn't necessarily mean that they'd sleep on the mountain. They might only hide during the day right? Isn't that the reason we came here to search the area?"

At Leo's rebuttal, Erika repeatedly blinked. She hid the fact that she was about to say the same line, and noticed that he was not convinced.

"Moreover, there isn't any need to camp in the mountains."

Erika followed up and made Mikihiko fall into silence, she hadn’t planned to do so, but Mikihiko tried to point out something.

"If it's only two or three people, they can also be hiding in a private house. Ancient spells can hypnotize people and those in the vicinity wouldn't even realize that they were there."

"Ah, locals. Traditional Magic can likely do that."

Were you keeping quiet because you were skeptical, Erika chimed innocently.

"Anyway why don't we split up and take a look at the surroundings first? I should be able to detect if any barrier is put up."

Tatsuya who had remained silent until that point made a proposal.

"No, that's inefficient."

Although he had nothing specific in mind, Mikihiko answered Tatsuya instantly.

"If they're hiding as a small group inside a barrier, you wouldn't be able to detect their presence from the outside; you'd be vulnerable to their attacks. Not that I doubt Tatsuya and Miyuki-san's ability, it's just impossible to walk around blindly to search for their presence unless you're blessed with an abundance of luck. We have no time to waste to rely on such a chance."

Tatsuya naturally nodded.

"I see. Then, what should we do?"

"I'll try to explore with my Shiki."

He answered Tatsuya and then faced Erika and Leo.

"Erika and Leo, would you help me?"

"What should we do?"

Leo replied with a very enthusiastic look on his face.

"I'll be vulnerable when I use my Shikigami and they will focus their attention on me. I want you to stay vigilant of the surroundings."

"Leave it to me."

In answer to Mikihiko, Leo nodded with a smile.

"…No choice. Very well, I'll protect you."

Erika disguised her face with a non-caring expression, yet her fighting spirit betrayed her face and her voice.

"I'm in your care. Next for Tatsuya's group."

After giving instructions to Erika and Leo——the two frowned thinking 'stiffy' or felt 'brackish'——Mikihiko faced Tatsuya again.

"Tatsuya, Miyuki-san and Sakurai-san, as we discussed last week, why don't you take a look around the city. Umm."

Mikihiko was giving Minoru, who was standing beside Minami a puzzled look.

"I will guide you guys. Last year, Second High also suffered the same trouble after all."

"Minoru is Fujibayashi-san's cousin."

Mikihiko, Erika, and Leo were in that location on October 30th last year. Tatsuya was revealed to be a secret military officer and they'd been forced to protect the secret. They remembered the name of the beautiful officer who accompanied them to Sakuragicho Station.

"Aaa…"

"Hmm… So you're her relative."

"Oh, so that's the edge."

Judging from the three reactions, they must have understood that they 'must not spread' the relationship between Tatsuya and Minoru.

"Umm, this is within our territory after all. If you intend to search for him in Kyoto, I can at least guide you around the region.

The three of them interpreted 'consultation with Fujibayashi' as 'consultation of mission with the JSDF', Tatsuya uttered those words as to amplify the misunderstanding.

"I see."

Mikihiko said 'I see' as he was nearing his limit in pretending to be calm.

"Then, Tatsuya, I'll leave that to you."

"Ah, you too."

"Yoshida-kun, Saijou-kun, Erika, see you later."

"Yeah, at the hotel."

Erika answered Miyuki in a loud voice, the seven of them split into two groups.

◊ ◊ ◊

Tatsuya's group headed towards a well-known temple in the northeast suburbs of Kyoto, the Sanzen-in Temple. However, Tatsuya had no plans to tour the precinct. He hadn’t come here to go sightseeing. This was the place where Zhou Gongjin was last spotted.

Originally, he was preconditioned by the view of the New International Convention Center, which made the city central look similar to his own neighborhood. However, now that he went to other areas, he had a more cohesive image of coziness in regards to Kyoto.

According to the information he obtained from Hayama, Kuroba's Intelligence troops had skimmed for Zhou Gongjin's whereabouts between the area of 'the tomb of the Great Emperor Toba' and 'the tomb of Emperor Juntoku'. As expected, they were not allowed to step into the area surrounding the tombs. The path leading to the tombs’ was complemented with a small downstream river.

He had the impression that Zhou had fled to the mountain when he first heard the information, however, the clues hinted that Zhou had escaped to normal local houses in the tourist area. By matching the landscape with the map, he could pinpointed that Zhou fled in the direction of 'Otonashi Falls', when Tatsuya remembered his opponent, he shook his head.

That direction pointed towards a Northeast orientation. Combining all of the information obtained thus far, it was a kind of foolish to think that an ancient magician would move in that direction. At first glance, the area boasted an overgrown forest dense with trees, which gave a sense of magic really flourishing there, but its true value was probably shown in large crowds.

If there wasn't anyone here, I should be able to detect his presence.

However, in this crowd, it was impossible to search for someone without being derailed from one’s sense of direction. In other words, if he couldn't recognize the other party, he wouldn't be able to spot the other party.

Before coming here, Tatsuya had guessed that Zhou lurked around in places deep within the mountain while avoiding people. However, he changed his mind when he saw the real location. From this downstream, it showed that he fled towards the village rather than the mountains, hiding in the city with a lot of people instead of secluding himself.

"The clues about his destination are pointing to Mt. Kurama, the place where the nearest traditionalist base is located, Tatsuya-san, do you want to go there?"

Minoru asked Tatsuya on the short bridge over the Ritsu River. Miyuki and Minami also looked at him, while he shook his head.

"No, let's head back to the city."

"So he is in the city?"

Minoru asked with slight surprise.

"Onii-sama, are you thinking that Zhou Gongjin is hiding in a place with a lot of people?"

Tatsuya nodded as an affirmation to Miyuki's question.

"I see. To hide a tree within a forest."

Minoru seemed to have a different idea than Tatsuya, yet he did not dare to correct Tatsuya.

"There are some traditionalist bases with a huge number of visitors such as... The peripheral of Kiyomizu Tera, the neighbourhood of Kinkakuji, and also the pavilion of Tenryuji."

"That's surprisingly few."

Even though he had heard from Minoru that the traditionalist factions were spread throughout Nara and Kyoto, Mikihiko was saying that Kyoto was the home of the traditionalists. From other various sources of information, Tatsuya had his preconception that the traditionalist faction was concentrated in Kyoto.

"Kyoto's sect carefully passed down the real traditions, so it's stronger than Nara. Any new faction that copies the name is pushed aside into the mountain area."

"Do you mean, they're labeling themselves as 'traditionalists' because they have a complex towards the traditionalists?"

Minami was amazed with the bad impression that was uttered by Tatsuya. Of course, this was not shown to Miyuki. Although she thought that this much of amazement shouldn't make her master throw a fit, but Minami chose to avoid unnecessary friction.

——Infact, Miyuki and Tatsuya both noticed.

Nevertheless, Minoru was not the same as Minami, he seemed to be able to receive Tatsuya's question.

"I don't know. As you know, the traditionalists were formed by the ancient magicians who participated in the Ninth Research Institute. Their goal is to retaliate against the former Ninth Institute members, and all the houses that carry 'Nine' in their names."

It was not unreasonable to say that the traditionalists became emotionally attached to resentment, which might lead to retaliation. They were convinced to particiapte in the Ninth Research Laboratory, and were assisting with the development of Modern Magic instead of furthering their own skills.

The slogan of Ninth Institute was fusion of modern and Ancient Magic, the real meaning was incorporating the Ancient Magic spells, adopting them to the Modern Magic Activation Sequence, they were not told of this secret. Upon the completion of the research, they were told that the research was for the purpose of establishing the Ninth Research Laboratory. They were given money in return, and only the people from the facilities gained social status, there was never any arrangement made to provide them with new magic.

'A secret art for a secret art', it could be said that it was their own narrow mindedness, thinking that it would naturally be granted and could even be deemed as a childish attitude.

"Yet, why do they choose to leave their birthplace of Nara and become scattered in Kyoto… I can't comprehend this action."

"Really? Motivation aside, I understand their reason for leaving Nara."

"Eh?"

At Tatsuya's frank reply, Minoru opened his eyes wide.

"The Traditionalist sect is not a unified organization. You were the one who told me about this."

"Ye-yes. I certainly said so."

"Then, wouldn't the difference in attitude towards the former Ninth Laboratory also vary? Those who strongly resent the 'Nine' stayed behind in Nara. While waiting for an opportunity to retaliate for the past three decades."

"How foolish… If only they applied their passion in a more constructive way, some of their practicioners might even excel at the national academic level."

"Well, don't put it like that."

To appease the disgusted Miyuki, Tatsuya gently brushed her head with his finger, revealing her dazzling hair.

"There aren't many people who can persevere and continue to look forward in any situation, right? At the very least, if we look around us."

The image of his father and his current wife flashed across Tatsuya's mind.

"…I see."

Miyuki nodded. Her smile must have sunken a little because she imagined the same face as Tatsuya did.

Tatsuya lightly ruffled Miyuki's hair with his hand.

Miyuki looked up at Tatsuya with inflated cheeks. Nevertheless, her eyes were laughing.

Tatsuya removed his hand from Miyuki's hair with a laugh.

"Although the remaining members in Nara, have a backwards purpose, their actions are still in sync with their original goal."

Miyuki wore a mystified face.

Of course, Tatsuya was not about to tease her over such a thing.

"Those who transferred their base to Kyoto, were afraid of the houses from the 'former Ninth Research Laboratory', despite having ill feelings against the former Ninth Instituite."

"Scared, is it? But, whether it's Kudou, Kuki or even the Kuzumi, I don’t think we’ve ever actually carried out any attack on the ancient magicians who were collaborating with the research…"

Minoru refuted with little confidence. It had happened before he was born, he also hesitated to ask for the complete story. Hence, his knowledge only came from basic hearsay, which led him to act this way.

"I do think so too. There were magicians of the ‘Nine’ who were also used in the experiments. But it was natural for the ancient magicians to think of themselves as victims, to avoid their consciousness as perpetrators. At the same time they were fellow subjects within the Ninth Research Laboratory, and it shouldn't have brought upon such hostility."

Minoru's eyes regained their composure after shaking anxiously. It was only Tatsuya's guess, but he was still relieved by the results of his remark.

"I think there are some ancient magicians who were afraid of their own shadows. Since the former Ninth Research Institude was operated by the government, it is reasonable for them to target their resentments towards the government. However, the traditionalists defined the houses of 'Nine', who came from the same Laboratory as their enemy. They should have understood that they were asking the wrong party for apologies."

After hearing those words, Minoru contemplated on them like a monk. ——Rather than actually posing like a Rodan sclupter, his sight was focused on an indeterminated line of nothingness.

"Whether they did not like the stigma of being rebels, or simply because they did not have the courage to rise against the government... Either way, because they understood their own resentment of the 'Nine' as something unreasonable I wonder if they also hadn't feared being exposed to an unreasonable attack. They themselves should have known the power of the magicians created by the former Ninth Laboratory. Thus, they did not dare to make a frontal attack against the magicians of the 'Nine'. If they do so, they would receive counterattacks, from the magic of the 'Nine' that they had cooperated to make."

Tatsuya must have thought that it was amusing, as he smiled wickedly.

"Alternatively, they were no longer united after the withdrawal. At first, the leaders of each sect might have been expedient in soothing the younger magicians who had extreme discontent. When it no longer posed a concern, the hard-liners who continued to resent the Ninth Laboratory stayed back in Nara, while the rest left for Kyoto. Surprisingly, the difference in locations might be mere pretense, their differences might have been something as simple as stance. Were all traditionalists faithful to 'one true tradition'?"

The last question was posed to Minoru.

"Well… The previous ancient magicians who participated in the Ninth Research Laboratory, came from more than one sect."

Minoru nodded to Tatsuya's speculation.

"Just for that trivial reason, are they going to continue their petty harassment for decades?"

Rather than 'couldn't believe', Miyuki wore a ‘didn’t want to believe' face while facing Tatsuya.

"Petty harassment, can't be helped if it was repetitive, since they managed to come all this way.

Tatsuya implied that, had they taken a more decisive hostile action, they would have been crushed long ago.

Miyuki seemed to have caught that well.

The one who was puzzled by Tatsuya's answer was Minami.

"But, Tatsuya nii-sama.

There might not be any need to pretend in front of Minoru, but Minami was using the designation just in case.

"I also think that it likely happened as you've said, but..."

She had no choice but to be hesitant here due to her position. However, Minami was driven by her sense of duty, and did not run from her words.

"If that was the truth, why did the traditionalists in Kyoto hire a number of foreigners to make such a disaster in Japan?"

Minoru thought that she had pointed out a sharp observation.

Yet, Tatsuya did not delay in answering her.

"Although this is just my conjecture, I wonder if they didn’t want to take some real action. However, they’ve invested so heavily in Zhou Gongjin that they neglect public welfare."

"There must be a reason why they haven’t cut their connection to him."

"Regarding this matter, Minoru also knew the details, the traditionalists received a supply of exiled Houjutsu users from Zhou Gongjin. It might look like the traditionalists had helped Zhou from a public point of view, but the fact is, they are cooperating with each other to enhance the strength of the traditionalists."

Tatsuya turned to face Minoru and gave him a nod.

"The recent incident in Nara Park, was also done by a mixture of assailants with a Houjutsu user from the continent. Within the traditionalist sect, exiled houjutsu users have gained a certain level of importance. At least to an extent, that the organization cannot endure the infighting if they were to revolt."

Minami bowed to Tatsuya in silence. Any sign of doubt was eliminated.

Tatsuya returned a small nod and faced Minoru.

"We've made a long detour in our conversation, this is why I wanted to explore those sites within the city. Our destinations are Kiyomizu Temple, Kinkakuji and Tenryuuji, these three.

"Yes, you are right."

Tatsuya did not retrieve his information terminal, but spread a map in his head instead.

"Kinkakuji and Tenryuuji are in the same direction, Kiyomizu Temple is in the opposite direction."

"At this rate, it would be better to merge with Yoshida-kun's group."

Miyuki proposed so while looking at her information terminal.

Indeed, from their current location, whether they went ahead to Kinkakuji and Tenryuuji, or to Kiyomizu Temple, it was closer to the New International Convention Center.

However, Tatsuya shook his head.

"It's trully regrettable that we have such a limited amount of time. Even after Minoru narrowed down the search area, we are still only four people. And there is still a possibility of him hiding in Kyoto City as I mentioned."

In the first place, it was an indisputable fact that four people was too small a number to search for a hiding opponent. A famous detective could only resolve the case if the criminal was before his eyes, however, in order to find a hiding suspect, more people were needed.

Unfortunately, neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki could use their magic, due to the wide range surveillance cameras. And there was no way that Tatsuya would have acted if they could be traced by a camera.

"I understand. Then, where should we head to?"

He must have decided the answer. Tatsuya answered Miyuki readily.

"Kiyomizu Temple. After that, let's take a look at Kinkakuji and Tenryuji as well."

◊ ◊ ◊

After splitting up from Tatsuya, Mikihiko was walking around the neighborhood of the New International Convention Center, while using a flashy searching spell as they discussed last week. There was a wide green park, a large lake and lush woodlands surrounding the Convention Center and it was often used by foreigners.

Erika and Leo were chatting with each other, while following Mikihiko from behind but they didn’t neglect their vigilance due to the escort role they’d been given.

The situation changed at about the same time as Tatsuya decide to go to Kiyomizu Temple. It was during the observation of the opposing bank of Takaragaike Lake near the competition venue.

The presence of killing intent rose up around the woods of Satoyama. Mikihiko realized it first, followed by Erika and Leo.

"They’re here."

Erika rushed to Mikihiko's left side, as if to look at his face under the tilting parasol——it was supposed to be camouflage and make them look like a sweet couple who were whispering to each other.

"From within the mountain?"

Leo thrust his neck in-between the gap of Erika and Mikihiko to whisper in a low voice. Whether being glued to each other or dating each other, they acted quite well.

"The presence was pointing to the mountain, but it doesn't guarantee that they're the only enemy. There's a probability that the attackers might not be human. Watch out."

Unfortunately, Mikihiko was not as carefree as the other two, he looked back with a discomforted frown, noting what Leo said.

"Only brats, they have some kind of a love triangle relationship."

"I can't see it as anything but students with love troubles, is it worth the risk to go out and attack them?"

These were the conversations of the nine men who were hiding below the grove, looking down at Mikihiko and company.

They were talking normally. Their voices were barely audible but they used a communication device that incorporated magic to read the movement of the lips, the conversation could be understood even without it emitting sounds. This method was at risk to eavesdropping, even before intercepting the conversation since there's a chance that the radio waves is discovered.

Thus, they took some precautions whenever they encountered this type of a situation, Erika and Leo would act as a couple that had no care about the world, just living a normal peaceful everyday life.

However, some of them were still alert.

"I've been observing that boy for a while, he was using a Shiki. He's the descendant of the Yoshida Family. We can't just leave him alone."

Those words raised the alertness of his companions.

"Hasn't the second son of the Yoshida lost his power?"

His voice rose as he asked about this, the middle aged man that seemed to be the leader of the group chided him with a harsh tone.

"That's outdated. Yoshida Mikihiko has regained his strength and has become even stronger than the first son." The atmosphere tightened. "We're going to confirm that. We won't kill him, a light injury will do for now."

Although the man who was rebuked was not convinced, he remained silent. He took out a small scroll from his chest, small enough to be held in his palm.

The other seven including the leader followed suit. A white haired traditionalist watched in silence without making any action.

"Ha!"

The first one to respond to the enemy attack was Erika. The parasol in her hand swung hurriedly at the presence that approached them from behind. The removable attachment of the umbrella was thrown in defense against the blue onibi[3]. Unhindered by the umbrella the blue onibi rained down around them as Erika shot them down with a weapon disguised as the umbrella handle.

A second and third waves of the onibi came in rapid succession, a thin silver rod intercepted from time to time, it was not an iron stick nor a gold stick, and it was a thin silver rod armament device.

This armament device was lent to Erika specifically for this Kyoto trip, it was made by FLT's 3rd Division with an activation spell that emphasized speed rather than weight, a movement type spell. The weapon does not only accelerate the body but the weapon itself as well. Hence, in order to keep up with the device the user has to put additional strain on the arm and it can create unnecessary weight in the arms with the risk of hurting the bone. However, Erika experienced nothing of the sort and had mastered its usage well.

The onibi rain ceased. However, it was not the end of the attacks.

Following the flutter of red and yellow colored leaves, came blades of wind. Although Erika had no difficulties in tackling the onibi, she wondered if she could intercept a blade made of wind with no shape or color.

A fearless smile crept up her lips, however, she returned to her normal stance once she heard 'leave it to me' from someone behind her.

Erika left the wind blades to Mikihiko.

He chose to use a metal fan charm to activate a wind-blade magic of the same type as the enemy.

A number of sparks could be seen in the air. Mikihiko's blades deflected every single one of the enemy's, despite being on the defensive.

---

[3] Onibi: fire ball, like the one Miyuki used for Mirage Bat practices.

Erika’s and Mikihiko's attention was focused on the next attack coming from the sky.

Behind them, the shadows of trees on the ground took the shape of a person.

A creature with a black shape rose from the ground.

Without any sound and blending its presence with the surroundings the shadow approached Mikihiko from the back.

"Uryaaa!"

Leo yelled at the shadow. He raised his fist, hammering down on a man in a black sweater.

Before being taken down by Leo, he reduced the impact by flinging himself backwards and then escaping with a somersault.

"Are these guys’ ninjas?"

After some observation, the black-looking sweater was a dark-green color. Even the color of the pants was the same. It was different from the traditional ninja costume, as if being modernized as a commonly worn outfit. However, judging from the Kunai[4] in his right hand and the scroll in his left hand the enemy was indeed a ninja.

Three more, five more human-shadows showed up. Leo didn't get the chance to see where they came from.

"Hehe, interesting."

However, it didn't affect his fighting spirit. Leo had no bad habits of seeking out formidable opponents but as long as the opponent was strong, he had the tendency to get hot-blooded.

It might be due to the genes that he inherited from his grandfather as he was produced as a biological weapon. Leo himself, occasionally thought so.

However, it was his way of exaggerating things in his mind.

——Which was why.

It was still much better than being anxious about losing even before the fight. Once the mind is defeated, it became impossible to even flee from the scene. That was what he thought.

When his mind is defeated, it was the same as forfeiting his life. He'd only flee, when he thought that he needed to flee.

He didn't flee because he hadn’t given up. Was the natural response of seeing a tiger bearing his fangs, not to run? He wasn’t running away, regardless of what he thought but in an emergency he wouldn't give up his survival.

——I rejected that kind of a pathetic death. I live to fight.

---

[4] Kunai: ninja’s blade, like in Naruto

The ninja’s in sweaters spread out around Leo. Consciously or not, they were retreating away from him.

At Leo's side, a hand was struck accompanied by a cry of pain.

The ninja who met Erika's Silver rod crouched down and held his broken arm. In that instant, the other ninja who was approaching Erika chose to jump away from her in order to escape. With those two factors in mind, she didn't have to be worried about another attack from the ninja.

"Leo, even though you’re hot headed, you need to keep your consciousness clear. You're not fighting alone, you know."

After Erika said that, Leo noticed an attack was coming from the side.

"Sorry, thanks for saving me."

The sounds of the blades of wind colliding caused sparks to scatter, which was heard by Leo.

"You're in the wrong too, Mikihiko. Why do you end up protecting your escorts."

"It's going both ways. Aren't you protecting me from the enemy's surprise attacks from the shadows?

"Ok, let’s go with that."

Leo took out a knuckleduster from his pocket. Even though it looked like a fashion apparel plastic toy, it served as a good disguise from the police.

So long as it's in contact with him.

An activation spell started to develop around his left wrist and was absorbed into it.

It was not the usual voice activated CAD.

It was a fully thought operated CAD from the German CAD manufacturer, Rozen, one of the latest works of the Magi Kraft Division. Leo obtained this CAD through a certain connection——though it was more as a form of an apology and it was only recently that he had mastered its usage.

However, this mission required weapons which were less noticeable.

Erika had an armament device disguised into a parasol, for this very purpose.

Since his usual CAD has a 'ready-to-fight' image, Leo opted to bring this CAD for this trip.

Even though the actual deployment speed depends on the hardware, the efficiency depends on the magic sequence or in other words, the software. The state-of-art thought-operated CAD showed the high processing speed by filling in the time lag of the thinking process. Tatsuya himself had optimized the Magic Sequence to prune the inefficiency in the software without any change in the expected result.

The knuckleduster was of a synthetic resin with cemented carbide reinforcement.

The activation spell was also set to be a successive output.

This time even the long sleeved shirt and jeans, were complemented with the highest grade bulletproof material.

"Well, then. Let's get started."

Leo produced a bam sound when both of his fists met each other.

"Let me take care of the enemy on this side."

Erika took a stance and swung her silver armament device.

"I'll assist you."

Mikihiko opened a fan-shaped magic instrument.

"Here I go, oraaa."

Leo was heading towards the enemy with a loud cry.

Naturally, the Ninjutsu user opponents didn’t just wait silently.

Leaves swirled up in front of Leo, obstructing his view. It goes without saying that it was an unnatural phenomenon. It was magic that manipulates the wind to lift and swirl the leaves.

The technique itself was not deadly. However, it was enough to make Leo halt his feet to cover his face with his arm.

There was a light shock to his arm, chest and thigh. It was a Kunai attack from the enemy.

The Kunai that were shot were unexpectedly fast, still their weight had been far too little against Leo's reinforcement magic.

A gust of wind blew.

From behind Leo.

Mikhiko's magic cleared up their vision.

The Ninjutsu user that stood before them ate his scroll and his hands, which were empty after throwing the Kunai, was making hand seals[5].

Even Leo could understand that the enemy in front of them was not a ninja like in the storybooks but a traditionalist magician with real presence and power. This was one of the well-known stereotypes giving a clear 'image of a monk', ruining his tension.

Although it didn't affect his rush, for a moment Leo himself was disturbed.

The chest of the Ninjutsu user bulged and deflated at once.

A loud sound was produced, and Leo was struck with dizziness.

The scroll that he swallowed earlier was a whistle in disguise. It was not just a normal whistle, it was a magic instrument for sensory organ interference via sound.

The Ninjutsu user took out his knife from its sheath. It was a knife instead of a Katana, even a 'Ninja' couldn't resist modernization.

He must have been confident in his own skill. There wasn’t a moment of hesitation before he pounced on Leo.

His miscalculation was that, Leo's flesh was not of some ordinary man. The general evaluation of Leo’s magical talent is somewhat low, however his physical ability is outstanding. Even with an obstructed sense of balance, Leo keeps his muscles in control with the help of the other senses.

The enemy thrusted his knife, Leo raised his right hand, wearing his knuckleduster and met the knife, as a result the knife was dropped in the impact.

And he struck down the enemy with a left hook.

Leo's fist just crushed the jaw of the Ninjutsu user.

"Yabeee[6]!"

That word was involuntarily spoken out, indicating his incorrect regret of failing to go easy on the enemy. Although his naiveté was a disadvantage; Leo had the ability to fill the gap.

Behind the man who was defeated, the next enemy showed up. The man stuck out his mouth at Leo. Leo laid down in that instant.

The man spewed out flames from his mouth.

A fan of flames passed by Leo’s head, however, the trajectory of the flame was reversed in the air and the opponent was late to notice.

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[5] Jutsu hand seals: something similar with Naruto’s

[6] YabEdits: slank word, meaninng: How dangerous, or that was close (in this case)

The fire-breather fell while rubbing his burnt face. The U-turn movement of the flame was due to Mikihiko's magic.

Behind Leo, Mikihiko scowled at the fog that he had created. However, Mikihiko didn’t hesitate for the next attack. He was already preparing the next spell to be activated.

As Erika herself said, she had to help Leo from being sandwiched by two Ninjutsu users. Her CAD had less weight in its blows when compared to her usual katana but the speed is greater. At the next moment, the body of the Ninjutsu user who had dropped his knife split into two.

"Bunshin[7]!?"

Erika raised her voice in surprise, the Ninjutsu user split himself into two and held a kunai, wearing a smug face at the same time.

However, the situation was quickly overturned.

One of the Bunshins disappeared and now there was only a single person. As it could be seen from the expression of the Ninjutsu user, it wasn't going according to plan. Mikihiko's spirit magic broke his Ninjutsu spell.

Erika wasn’t going to miss this chance.

Four silver trajectories were drawn in the sky.

Both the hands and feet of the Ninjutsu users were broken to the bone and they were lying on the ground before a weak lightning struck them.

The lightning had been prepared to attack all of the enemies.

Mikihiko delivered a lightning magic to the eight Ninjutsu users who had already lost their combat strength, and knocked them unconscious.

Mikihiko let out a big sigh.

"Is this the end?"

Leo looked around while saying this.

Meanwhile, Erika took down the remaining prey.

"There's no sign of reinforcements."

Leo took a deep breath after hearing her.

"We just fought ninjas."

Leo laughed. Even though he knew of their existence, he'd never thought he could exchange blows with one.

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[7] Bunshin: Shadow Clone

"They are Ninjutsu users. They are not that rare. Because they live in a world where old-fashioned magic is preferred after all."

Yet, Erika didn’t join in on Leo’s laughter, and curtly replied so.

"You're right. Moreover, this isn’t so far off Iga and Koga, the base of Ancient Magic; even Mt. Kurama has turned into a center of Ninjutsu users. I wonder if these guys are from the same faction."

Mikihiko supported Erika's claim.

"Hmph, it's probable. How interesting. I never get bored whenever I'm with you guys."

Leo didn’t get offended. Rather, he seemed to have enjoyed the situation.

"Wait a second, I got dragged into this problem thanks to Tatsuya."

This is Tatsuya-kun’s fault, rather it was thanks to Tatsuya-kun. Although she pretended to complain, Erika's real feelings were the same as Leo’s.

"No difference."

Leo smiled wryly. Beside him, Mikihiko also threw in a wry smile.

"By the way, what should we do with them? Leave them to the police?"

Erika had no hesitation to call the police. Not because of her connection to the police but due to the fact that she acknowledged their authority.

"The Police, huh."

Seems like Leo has something against the police. However, he didn't blatantly reject Erika's proposal.

"I wonder if that's for the best…"

Mikihiko agreed to Erika's proposal, he took out his information terminal with the hand that didn't carry an auxiliary device. He intended to contact '110' on his own.

However, his finger stopped as he attempted to start the voice call.

He unconsciously stopped his movement from tapping on the pocket terminal.

He glared into the woods while holding his fan-shaped device. Mikihiko released a mass of Psion’s. He sent his Shikigami to search the area.

"Enemy?"

Mikihiko didn’t have time to answer Leo's question.

"Look!"

Mikihiko started his activation sequence, as Erika cried out.

Erika's eyes were directed to the pond.

Leo and Mikihiko saw it as well.

From the pond, four beasts formed from the water jumped out.

"Kasei-tai[8]!?"

Leo shouted.

"No! Kugutsu-shiki-oni[9] shaped with water, a type of golem! It has a real substance!"

While shouting to answer them, Mikihiko stared at the monster without blinking.

"Reirei? Gouyu? Chouyuu? Even Fusho?"

Mikihiko spoke with a dazzled voice.

A striped cow that resembled a tiger, Reirei.

Wild boar with a human face, Gouyu.

Chouyuu was a monkey with four arms.

And Fusho, a deer with four horns.

These were all smaller versions of the beasts from the continent, which were said to cause floods. This was clearly the deed of the traditionalists from the continent.

"What are these guys!?"

"The enemy's magic! Nothing else matters besides that, right!"

Shouting back to Leo, Erika swung her Silver rod against the closest Kugutsu-shiki-oni to her. The enemy was not out of reach.

The thin blade emitted Psion's when it touched at the edge.

It cut off the magic spell that sustained the golem. A water-shaped beast usually returned to water upon scattering.

However, there was no time to put their guard down.

The beasts weren't only those four.

Reirei, Gouyu, Chouyuu and Fusho landed one after another in the pond. Creepy evil appearance aside, the monsters were about the size of a parlor dog, so it didn't look to be very threatening.

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[8] Kasei-tai: is one in which were visualized the spiritual energy →Make a mass appearance in illusion magic with the foundation of the Psion, interfere weight in substance, acceleration, and shows as if they have a body, etc. Movement magic. The name "kasei-tai" were given by researchers of modern magic when analyzing ancient magic, to be used exclusively for ancient magic. (http://www49.atwiki.jp/mahouka/pages/366.html)

[9] Kugutsu-shiki-oni: demon-type puppet/shikigami

However, they weren’t quite as harmless as a parlor dog. Beside the fact that the opponents are magical creatures, they didn't know if the monsters had any hidden powers.

"Firstly, let's retreat fro-?"

Erika was left speechless before finishing her proposal of escape.

The miniature beasts went to the defeated Ninjutsu users on the ground instead of their group.

"Is it not an enemy?"

Erika wasn’t the only one trapped in surprise. Putting Leo who had no long-distance attacks aside, even Mikihiko has also forgotten his magic activation.

"Tsk!?"

The three stared at what's happening and gasped in unison.

The miniature beasts whose bodies were formed of water, began to devour the bodies of the living Ninjutsu users that couldn't move due to injuries.

"Don't kid with me!"

Erika reigned in her surprise and started to wield his silver rod again.

Mikihiko was shaken out of his paralysis by Erika's voice, he started a flame spell.

The Psion blade tore out the Kugutsu-shiki-oni, the flame ruined the Magic Sequence that sustained the monsters.

All of the monsters returned into water.

Leo worriedly approached the Ninjutsu users who were groaning in pain. He had activated reinforcement magic earlier, but due to the shock, the damages on their faces and necks was unavoidable.

"Uugh."

When he crouched down to get closer, that was the first cry he made.

"It does look hideous, but it doesn't seem like it had reached their bones yet."

Leo straightened his waist to face Erika and Mikihiko.

"And everyone is alive."

Even though their eyes and throats were numb, their vital signs seemed to be fine. Mikihiko put on a relieved expression when he heard that.

However, Erika was still on high alert.

"Strange."

"What is?"

Her unusual appearance made Mikihiko nervous again.

"Why does the water not soak into the ground?"

The ground is not paved here. Hence, the water that had formed the golem should soak into the soil naturally.

In contrast, the water mixed with blood was flowing back to the pond.

"Uwogh!?"

Leo jumped back reflexively to distance himself. Even though jumping four meters far without a run-up, preliminary action, nor magic, showed that his jump force was amazing, but Erika and Mikihiko weren’t paying attention to it.

They immediately noticed the unnatural movement of the water, the movement of the water which was mixed with the blood, suddenly started rapidly gaining momentum. Leo reacted quickly by retracting his footing from the flow of blood and water.

"What in the world…"

"Enemy magic!"

Erika's puzzled question was answered by Mikihiko, with a warning at the same time.

But, it might not have been needed in the first place. The phenomenon which occurred in front of their eyes, could be observed by Erika and Leo. The water in the pond was swirling.

Gently, at first, and then increasing in speed.

Then, from the center of the whirlpool came a torrent of sound, it was a serpent made out of mud, rearing its neck.

"Souryuu[10]!"

It was a giant snake with nine human faces. The large specter[11] of the continent named as the evil god of the flood, 'Kyoe'. When the Souryuu appeared in the land, the water would rot and unexpectedly ruin the soil[12].

"Get away!"

Seeing that the nine of them started to open their mouths, Mikihiko shouted to Erika and Leo.

At the same time, he expanded the wind barrier.

From the mouth, narrow muddy water flowed out one after another.

The two of them, then, tried to avoid a direct hit from the streams.

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[10] Souryuu → http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiangliu

[11] 巨蛇: kyoda --> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madtsoiidae

[12] unfruitful swamp: acidic soil, can't be used for agriculture

The splashes that rebounded from the ground were blown away by the wind barrier which was swirling around the three of them.

However, the Ninjutsu users who were unable to move, couldn't avoid the aftermath of the attack.

A bitter voice rang out from the defeated men who lay on the ground when the miniature monster spat out the mud.

The body parts that were bathed in the muddy water from the Souryuu's mouth melted.

"Acid!?"

"No, it's a corrosive curse."

Mikihiko denied Erika's words.

"Be careful! Unlike acid, it doesn't only melt the part that came in contact with the liquid."

Even though they had not received any injuries from this attack, but they didn’t doubt Mikihiko's words, especially after seeing what happened to the Ninjutsu users.

"Argh. Where's the operator!?"

If he was able to manipulate this much, the operator should have been in the vicinity.

No, the idea was spot on. The presence of the operator was detected a little while ago from within the forest. Unmistakably, he was the one who manipulated this monster. However, the Shikigami that he dispatched earlier hadn’t reported anything. Is it a sign of his skill, or special equipment, for example a Buddhist charm to disorient magician’s senses using a Kimon Tonkou.

Even with Erika's and Leo's physical skill, it took a lot of effort to avoid the uninterrupted stream of muddy water from the nine mouths. Mikihiko also had his hands occupied putting up barriers in order to avoid direct hits, he couldn't afford to activate a new Shikigami.

"Erika, Leo, let's retreat from here!"

"I agree with you wholeheartedly, but!"

"How are we going to do that!?"

Mikihiko clenched the back of his teeth at Erika's retort.

There is a way. The power of a puppet from folklore could be increased based on its lore. Therefore, there are cases where the magician wasn’t able to hold against the amplification of the magic, borrowed from a higher individual from folklore, which resulted in the cancellation of the entire spell. Even if not, in the end the control of the spell would depend on the power of the magician.

Although it was fake, Souryuu belongs to the water kin. The highest level of spirit among the water kin was a spell for 'Dragon' (Can I do this?).

I should be able to do it now.

However, the hesitation remained.

That was the magic that caused Mikihiko to fall into a slump and made him think that he 'lost his power'.

——In the end, Mikihiko didn’t have the chance to decide. He no longer needed to make that decision.

An intense light of Psion’s appeared before the three, the snake that carried nine heads, was enveloped by it.

From the information body, a Magic Sequence formed. The virtual magic area appeared suddenly in the information body with defined coordinates, instead of bombardments of ballistics.

The body of the snake with nine human faces exploded.

As a result, the Magic Sequence at the core of the Kugutsu-shiki-oni was blown away, which means that the magic information that formed the beast itself has been shattered.

The water that splattered in the aftermath wasn’t cursed. It returned to being ordinary water from the pond. The corrosion that was occurring on the bodies of Ninjutsu users also stopped.

"Are you alright?"

The three of them were worried, and thinking 'what just happened?'. The answer was right before their eyes.

The black slim pants and dark red jacket, with black boots, it was the uniform of Third High School. Moreover, the boy held a red gun-shaped CAD in his right hand. Upon seeing that appearance, the three of them recognized him instantly.

"Ichijou Masaki."

Leo said his name in surprise.

The Ace of Third High, from the 10MC. Ichijou's first son stood before the three.

Masaki looked around, wary of ambushers——observing if there was any sign of magic being activated. He decided to tone down his tension after a while of not finding any enemies lurking around.

In front of him, there were eight defeated humans who had suffered serious injuries. Masaki also perceived that they weren’t the victims, but the attackers who had been defeated, and since they couldn't move, there was no meaning for Mikihiko to check on their situation.

"Hmm? You're from First High…"

Masaki remembered Leo’s and Mikihiko's face from last year's Monolith Code.

"Yoshida Mikihiko. Ichijou-kun, thanks for your help."

However, he didn’t seem to remember their names. When Mikihiko introduced himself, Masaki's face was relieved.

"No, you're welcome. As a magician from the 10MC, I cannot afford to overlook that malicious magic. Please don't mind it."

"At any rate, you saved us. That was quite close."

"Ah, no… by the way, what was that?"

The sudden change of the topic might have been caused by his embarrassment. If that's the case, Masaki has a different personality than Tatsuya, in that he is 'shy'――However, the subject of comparing them might not be appropriate at this time.

"Kugutsu-shiki-oni with blood as an offering to shape a monster from water, a type of golem magic."

"So it's Ancient Magic?"

"It's a technique called Houjutsushi[13], which is commonly used by magicians from the continent."

Hearing the exchange between Masaki and Mikihiko, Erika interrupted with a displeased voice.

"Hey, can we do the lecture after? That Houjutsushi might still out there somewhere."

Masaki looked around quickly with an alarmed expression. He seemed to have forgotten that possibility. On the other hand, Mikihiko shook his head as response to Erika's words.

"No, there's no possibility of that."

"How can you be so sure!"

Mikihiko tried to open his mouth several times, before shaking his head again.

"It's better to just see the real condition instead of hearing my words. Let's go and see."

"Judging from your words, have we incapacitated the Houjutsushi operator?

Instead of answering Leo's question with words, Mikihiko nodded.

"Do you know his whereabouts?"

Involuntarily, Masaki was about to open his mouth to interpose.

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[13] Houjutsushi: doll forming magic

"Are you coming, Ichijou-kun?"

He was invited instead, Masaki nodded at that invitation.

They went uphill to the forest. It didn't take much effort for the four of them to walk that path. They hadn’t even dropped a single globule of sweat as they discovered the Houjutsu user that they were looking for.

"As I thought. I understood what would happen, but it's still not a pleasant feeling."

The Houjutsu operator had fallen with his face facing down the soil.

"Is he dead…?"

Much to Masaki's surprise, Leo had no fear that he could get attacked and squatted down next to the white-haired head of the Houjutsu operator to touch his neck.

"…There's no pulse. He's dead."

Expressionlessly, Leo seemed to be indifferent. He was not so insensible as to smile while reporting in front of the corpse, this was the most appropriate attitude that he could think of. However, that meekness disappeared as soon as the corpse jerked.

Erika let out a piercing scream. Even for her, it was an inevitable shock after seeing the contorted face of the corpse.

"It's the result of the broken spell. Ancient Magic of this system manipulates the puppet with the spirit of the operator, their consciousness keeps being connected after the magic has been activated."

"Hoo. Once Modern Magic is activated, there would be no backflow of information. Ancient Magic Sequences seem to be quite different when compared to Modern Magic."

Hearing Mikihiko's words, Masaki involuntarily opened his mouth. Immediately after the explanation, he released the meaning behind Mikihiko's description.

"In other words, this guy received the damage after I destroyed the spell that connects him to that monster, which led to damaging his spirit…?"

"It's not your fault. The magician must have understood the risks of this magic. Especially, if he wanted to manipulate such a huge Kugutsu-shiki-oni. Naturally, the consequences are multiplied. Cold as it seems, that was the exchange made by the operator."

"So, it's that kind of a power."

This was not the first time Masaki saw dead people——even for killing, this was not his first time either. He had claimed the lives of others, though he was just forced to do that. Even now, 'Rupturing' the monster of water was the right decision.

Nevertheless, even with his experiences, he still couldn't react cold heartedly, especially when he saw the brutal look of this old man.

"…Sorry, Yoshida. For making you anxious."

"Don't mind it. You helped us after all."

Masaki forced a smile, Mikihiko also shook his hand with a smile.

"Ichijou-kun, please leave the explaining to the police to us."

Mikihiko was intending to let Masaki go, however Masaki did not agree with his words.

"No, I'll go too. On the other hand, the girl over there, umm."

"My name is Chiba Erika. Don't worry about me. Since I'm used to these kinds of things."

Masaki stared at her stiffly in response to those words. However, when he thought that his reaction was rude, he immediately reigned himself in.

"I see. You're from the Chiba Family?"

"I'm Chiba Erika, a sophomore at First High."

At Erika's nonchalant reply, Masaki lightly batted his eyes. With the exception of his sister, he almost never received cold treatment from girls around his age.

"Pardon my rudeness. I'm Ichijou Masaki, a sophomore at Third High."

Then, it reminded Leo that he hadn't done any introduction, so he identified himself while trying to tone down the awkwardness.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance. First High, second year, Saijou Leonhart."

Just like that, he probably managed to dispel the awkwardness, and it did seem that the target behaved the way he intended——Leo introduced himself to Masaki.

"Ichijou, you must have prior engagements, right? Don't hold yourself back for us, we can handle this by ourselves now."

"Don't mind it. I came to Kyoto alone. I came for the preliminary inspection in this city for the Thesis Competition to avoid an incident like last year. So, I can afford the time."

"Huh? Actually, we are here for that as well. Umm, let's report to the police first."

Leo said that as a follow up,

"Ah, Hello. My name is Chiba Erika, sophomore at National Magic First High School. I'd like to talk to the magic crime division. We were attacked by some magicians… the location is…"

When they heard her voice, Leo and Masaki looked at each other with a wry smile.

◊ ◊ ◊

While Mikihiko's group was fighting the enemy at the opposite side of the Kyoto New International Convention Center helped by Masaki, Tatsuya's party steadily approached Kiyomizu Temple.

There was no deep reson behind Tatsuya choosing to visit Kiyomizu temple first. If there was a reason, it was due to the thought that there was ‘something’ hidden behind its exterior.

From the foundations of the first Shogun, its involvement in Sakanoueno Tamuramaro, the episode of pacifying the Kanto region by magic, it was a land with history. Also, the deep involvement the Minister of Justice had with religions from the north, Tatsuya packed and marked some knowledge of Kyoto.

The Minister of Justice had yet to realize the common ground with Modern Magic Theory. ——Looking from a childs point of view, Tatsuya had no other way to understand 'zen' besides as 'wisdom'.

At any rate, it wasn’t his priority to believe in a higher existence, he didn’t see any point in selecting one of the three choices whose existences he couldn’t see.

Mt. Otowa was a long hill up to Kiyomizu Temple. Hence, they decided to take the commuter halfway, and walk from Takaya. Actually, Minoru was not so sure of the specific place and said, 'there is a base of traditionalists nearby'. So, they decided to walk slowly while examining as if there was a suspicious building.

The bustling atmosphere hadn’t changed from the previous century. Even though the number of foreign tourists had reduced significantly during the global war, but under the new 'Rediscover Japan' program, the number of tourists had been increasing again. However, there wasn’t any influx of Japanese citizens going overseas.

Moreover, at superficial level, the peace had been regained. The hill was crowded by people with different skin colors, different hair colors, worshippers with different eye colors.

"What an amazing crowd…"

Those words leaked involuntarily from Tatsuya,

"Tokyo has more people, doesn’t it?"

Minoru answered in wonder.

At that very moment, a pile up and slip accident occurred. This was due to the admiration of Minoru by multiple female tourists. ——And amazingly, it didn’t exclusively happen only to 'young' women.

Tatsuya's group had been avoiding crowded places previously, he didn't want Miyuki and Minami to be caught in an accident. He sensed a cold gaze on them but it was pretty far behind, it was quite fortunate to have the distance to check and balance with each other.

Nevertheless, Miyuki stuck perfectly by Tatsuya's side, she would never be swayed by the multitude of people even when they suddenly surged in. Should that happen, Tatsuya would protect her with his power.

Even so, after he made sure of Miyuki's safety, he answered Minoru's question.

"Even in Tokyo, the place that we live in is quite quiet. And there's not as much traffic either."

"I don't think that's the case… Does it maybe look that way due to the smaller space?

"Certainly, there are cases like that."

Tatsuya was talking about occupant density rather than the total number of people just now, but he chose to stop arguing, since it was not related to the task at hand.

"By the way, Minoru, can we make our first destination, Kiyomizu Temple?"

"Yes. There is a close walking path here, it stands out since it is inside the forest. I think they might be disguised as a souvenir shop or as a cafeteria."

"Meaning, there's hardly any need to enter."

Soon Tatsuya was glared at with intense pressure, like thick snow clouds hanging heavily over his head. It didn't seem to be a misconception.

Tatsuya turned around to his left.

"Onii-sama, is there something?"

Miyuki gracefully smiled there.

Was it my imagination… other boys would think that way.

However, Tatsuya would not be deceived by such a thing. He looked at Miyuki firmly without showing a hint of doubt.

"Do you want to inspect it?"

Miyuki's eyes swam. But only for a moment.

"Since we are here."

The meaning was straightforward, no matter how he worded it.

Tatsuya was thinking that he might need to reschedule today's appointment.

'Kiyomizu no butai kara tobioriru'[14], overlooking Kyoto city from the infamous Kiyomizu Temple sure brought back the idiom. Tatsuya set his eyes slightly in the direction of the city and hazily detected Psion light from the magicians on land. So long as one was a magician, he could see the hint of light, even more so with Elemental Sight, which focused on Psion detection in unseen places. It could process a great amount of data in an unlimited amount of time until he found the desired result. However, Tatsuya hadn’t met Zhou Gongjin yet, just the photo was not enough.

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[14] 'Kiyomizunobutaikaratobioriru' → an idiom. Literally: to jump from the stage of Shimizu. Meaning: to be prepared in doing something out of desperation

To stop the meaningless sightseeing, Tatsuya spoke to Minoru who was similarly looking down at the city.

Did you get anything?

"No, at most just miscellaneous gazes… How about on your end, Tatsuya-san?"

"Likewise."

After saying so, Tatsuya turned to Miyuki and Minami.

Two people leaned lightly on the handrail, looking down below. Both of them were not the type to make a fuss, but the height might make others fidgety. However, from Tatsuya's perspective, they could be seen as innocently enjoying their time, and forgetting the task at hand for a while.

"I've checked all the gazes that were directed towards Miyuki, but I didn't find anything suspicious."

"A-All of them?"

"Ah, nothing inexcusable, there have been a lot of gazes directed at you as well Minoru. It is highly possible that they're not related to the task at hand."

"That… I'm sorry to cause you extra work.”

The countless worldly desired gazes upon Miyuki came from men.

While almost the same amount of gazes were received by Minoru from the women.

Minoru was also conscious of this. It was not a narcissistic attitude, but an objective fact. Minoru also understood that it only increased the magnitude of information that needed to be processed.

"No, I'm used to it."

However, for Tatsuya, this is a daily task with no need of extra strength to tackle it. Still, he was only filtering the waves of gazes towards Miyuki. In this case, there were possible hostilities directed at himself, and also the gazes bestowed upon Minoru, even Tatsuya himself had no confidence in telling them apart.

And what was more troublesome is that Minoru was probably recognized as an enemy by the traditionalists.

"There might not be much meaning to continue like this."

After Tatsuya said that, Minoru’s chest fell. He must have blamed himself for causing this situation, he had the look of a jumpy puppy that had been scolded.

If there are strong emotions, he couldn't help but notice them, even if those feelings were not intended for him. That moved the feelings of the younger boy.

"Ah, no, it's not your fault. You have been very helpful today. However, the leads are just poorer than expected."

Minoru smiled shyly after hearing Tatsuya's words.

The rattling sounds of the handrail and pillars as well as the footsteps was heard. Tatsuya didn’t need to see what happened, he already had an idea of what was going on.

However, Miyuki was curious of that conversation. She moved her sights to them, and immediately decided on what to do.

Miyuki came closer to Tatsuya and Minoru. She scolded Tatsuya and covered for Minoru.

"Onii-sama, please don't bully Minoru-kun."

He wouldn't take offense to that, but she was adding fuel directly into the fire.

No, the result was a reversion of what she intended to.

A beautiful girl protecting a beautiful boy.

The men who gazed at Miyuki, the women who gazed at Minoru, froze at once.

The strange atmosphere was seen as an attraction by the worshippers and tourists alike.

Regardless of what they were doing, everyone’s eyes stopped all the same.

Time had stopped at Kiyomizu Temple.

Tatsuya looked at his surroundings and was confused by the situation. He felt that it was a big exaggeration, but he couldn't deny the reality of what happened before his eyes.

The female tourists, stared at Minoru. However, there were a few exceptions.

The male tourists, stared at Miyuki. Although, there were some exceptions from female tourists that also stared at Miyuki. What a bunch of freaks, Tatsuya cursed in his head. He was a man that had a broken moral compass, to the extent that he didn’t feel guilty about murder but had common ethics regarding sexual love with the same sex. He was fine with it being platonic but disliked physical lust.

It was also uncomfortable because it did not suit the place——it didn't affect anything because the object of those stares was not him, but someone he knew——Tatsuya thought of a way to escape this place as soon as possible.

Hence, he was determined to investigate the suspect again. It was best to avoid problems before they grew entangled later on.

Along the way, Tatsuya spotted the foreign gaze.

It was not abnormal, but foreign.

The man, stared at Minoru.

He was stiff, as other people.

Just,

flavorless,

desireless,

admiration less,

more towards disgust.

That man's face expressed 'why do I need to spy on this kind of a kid'.

(Isn't this an insult to my great achievements?)

This time, Tatsuya's mind wandered and thought of such words.

"Minoru, Miyuki, Minami. Let's move on."

Tatsuya did not wait for their replies before advancing along the path they were treading on earlier.

Miyuki understood Tatsuya's intention immediately, she followed her brother in silence.

Minami showed a puzzled expression for a split second, but chose to follow after Miyuki soon after.

However, Minoru could not understand him without asking. He hurried himself to catch up with Minami, while Miyuki was walking by Tatsuya's side.

"Tatsuya-san, why did you suddenly...?"

So long as he didn't use magic to stalk them, it was possible for Minoru to not detect him. Judging from his appearance, he couldn't help but become desensitized towards people's stares.

Most likely, the man who watched Minoru was not a magician, instead of just not using magic. We were wary of traditionalist magicians, so a non-magician private detective might escape our notice. Tatsuya thought that this was quite an interesting point of view.

Tatsuya took out his information terminal and stylus from his pocket instead of answering Minoru. He ran the stylus at the screen from end to end. His handwriting had been converted into digital characters. Minoru read what was written on the display.

"I found a person who seems to be tailing us. Pretend that you aren’t aware of him to lure him out."

Minoru wore a confused expression after he heard the instruction, since he mistook it with 'I’ve noticed but I don’t know which one'. However, he immediately understood that the meaning was

'I noticed him, but I wasn't able to determine the stalker', Minoru began to act restlessly looking left and right.

Frankly speaking, it was a poor performance. Tatsuya reaffirmed his thoughts of, 'as expected, it seems like he hasn’t received any other training besides magic', after giving Minoru a side glance.

Putting that aside, the ‘unaware pretending’ seemed to make the stalker think that his target wasn’t even 'pretending to be aware'. Whether it came from the confidence of his skills, or simply showing his second-rate abilities. The man that had been marked by Tatsuya, was tailing Minoru while maintaining a certain distance.

Tatsuya got off from the path leading from the 'inner shrine' to 'Otowa Falls', and was waiting at the fork leading to 'Koyasu Tower'.

He looked back at Miyuki and the others. It was natural to consult whether or not to catch the stalker that had entered his field of vision.

He stopped the same way as Tatsuya had thought. The stalker took out a small camera, and started to look at the scene of the main hall from below. It was not particularly strange for a tourist to do so. However, it is natural to keep taking pictures from the same composition. He was not aware of Tatsuya's prying eyes. The man advanced his step to 'Otowa Falls'.

"Hey, you."

Tatsuya soared out a posing displeased voice to his back.

The stalker ran away shaken. However, he pretended not to notice while taking off from the scene.

"Can't you hear me, you over there!"

Tatsuya closed in the distance with the stalker quickly. Originally, Tatsuya's face was already sharp, in addition to that, Tatsuya wore an angry face. The tourists in the surrounding fixed their eyes on them.

"Do-do you need anything from me?"

The stalker looked back at Tatsuya with a timid look. At first glance, it looked like a good citizen was entangled by bad students. The stalker's acting of being a timid-looking citizen deserved to get a passing grade. If Tatsuya was alone, the bystanders would have become his ally.

"Didn't you just record us on your spy camera?"

In this one phrase, the hostilities of the people inside the gallery were converging on the stalker. It was a high possibility, considering that Miyuki was such a beautiful girl and Minoru also a beautiful boy, nobody doubted that such a middle-aged man would stalk them.

"Baseless accusations! On what grounds."

The man shouted his innocence, but the situation was unfavorable for him and gradually tightening around him. The bystanders seemed to have noticed the camera that he brought, the stalker frantically shoved the small camera into his bag. His behavior made everyone more suspicious of him as a voyeur suspect.

"Whether it was a baseless accusation, we'll let the security guards deal with you."

Tatsuya bluntly said so. And the gallery's bystanders were completely allied with Tatsuya.

The stalker started running and stumbled through the crowd. He must have thought he could completely elude Tatusya.

Less than 10 meters to the gate, Tatsuya overcame the bitter guy.

Tatsuya dragged the stalker back. However, Minoru interrupted when he was about to report the man to the gallery's security guard, saying 'this person also has a life, it's too pitiful to hand him over to the police for this matter'.

The man made a timid look, fretfully switching between looking at Tatsuya and looking down.

Tatsuya stared back at him expressionlessly.

The man faltered in his gaze, as if he was looking at an inorganic substance.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"We're going to deal with you personally."

After hearing Tatsuya's reply, the stalker's face filled with suspicion[15].

"Are you aware that this is contrary to professional ethics? Who is your employer?"

The man's eyes swam left to right frantically. As if looking for an escape route. It was not like Tatsuya's group was threatening the man, but Tatsuya chose to lead the man to an abandoned gate.

"…What do you want."

One of Tatsuya’s assumptions was that, the man had chosen to 'play dumb'.

"Do you know that he is a direct descendant of the 10MC, the pinnacle of Japan's magician community?"

The eyes of the man were not upset. But were as good as white when he knew this.

"Your employer knew that we are magicians. That was the reason he employed a non-magician detective."

Tatsuya stretched out his hand with his watch while saying so.

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[15] usankusai: fishy business, suspicious

The man's body was trembling visibly. Tatsuya still wore the face which lacked any emotion, only with a smile on his lips.

"Unauthorized use of magic could end with you being punished!"

Miyuki laughed gracefully. She was thinking that may be the man who was at the 'end of his rope'.

However, in the eyes of the stalker, it was perceived as a smile of a ruthless witch.

Magicians CAD's and equipment were as familiar to the non-magic community as OOPARTS. The general public's knowledge about magic was limited to preconceptions such as 'using magic with a tool that is wrapped around the arm'. Thus, the misunderstanding of Tatsuya's gesture with his watch as preparation for using magic was understandable.

"I will only ask once more."

Tatsuya activated his Psion's. This stage of release wouldn't even be considered as magic by the sensor. However, the Psion wave emitted might reveal the true character of non-magicians due to the mental pressure.

"Where is your employer?"

The man didn't answer. Even if he was just being obstinate, he had great professionalism.

Yet, he was reaching his limit. A man could not withstand the fear of the unknown for too long. One may be able to withstand fear from a defined source, however, when one was faced with an unknown source of fear, it could easily cause panic.

"I see, how regrettable."

Tatsuya moved his fingers towards the wristwatch. The multi-function watch was linked to the information terminal but it was only information equipment. They couldn't possibly assist in invoking magic——

"I got it! I'll tell you."

This man wasn't a magician, so he wasn't supposed to be able to understand.

"Is it here?"

The mentally shattered man had guided them to a certain tofu shop near the shrine.

"Ah, I'm not lying."

The man quickly spoke, while clinging his eyes to Tatsuya.

"Hey? Isn't this good enough? I'm just a humble private investigator, as that boy over there stated, I was just doing a request to report on what you were doing after you came to this area. I don't know anything more besides that."

"Compared to that, you seem to know the house of the employer quite well."

If this kind of request was put out, one wouldn't disclose their identity. At least, this is what I would do, was what Tatsuya was thinking about.

"Well, I don't want to cross over onto the dangerous path. The detective industry today is not so carefree."

"It’s a tough world."

"My goodness, it truly is…"

Tatsuya let out a small laugh. The detective wasn’t a priestly man. It was likely he wasn’t suitable for honest work but he might be good at information gathering.

"I understand. Good work."

The man wore an unbelieving expression. He did not expect to hear that phrase since he was being interrogated.

"…Is that fine?"

"I just said so."

"Wouldn't you cut my head from the back or something."

"You've been watching too much drama."

Tatsuya answered with a wry smile at the amazed voice. It seemed to have relieved the opponent even though neither the attitude nor the expression belonged to that of a teenaged boy.

"I-I see. Then."

However, what Tatsuya didn't say was showed that he wasn’t good with people.

"I know what you’re thinking. It's easy to figure out where you live, it’s better to talk now, if you still have something to say."

The man's face was clouded with fear.

"E-even for a magician, such a thing is…"

"Why do you think so?"

The man shook his head quickly in desperation.

"I'm not lying! It's the truth, believe me!"

"If you're not lying, then you don't need to be so frightened."

The man seemed to be tripping on his own legs as he ran down the slope towards the shrine.

Minoru had been taken aback by Tatsuya's handling of that man, Miyuki chided in about his tone after Tatsuya was done with the stalker.

"Onii-sama, didn't your prank go too far?"

Tatsuya looked back with a 'how regrettable' look on his face.

"I didn't have any intention to prank him. I didn't even think that I would be able to force him to speak using magic. In the first place, I have no affinity with Mental Interference Magic."

"Was that the reason you acted with a threatening attitude?"

"That’s right."

"…However, it did seem like you enjoyed it quite a bit."

"That would be counter-productive right? Anyway, we need to get in first."

Miyuki was still insisting on her opinion, but Tatsuya went off to the store without waiting for her.

"Welcome!"

A cheerful voice welcomed Tatsuya. It was a clerk in a kimono, she was in her late twenties to early thirties. Although Tatsuya thought that a more composed attitude would suit the local better, he wondered if that was his own prejudice.

"Table for four?"

Tatsuya was about to shake his head lightly and say 'no' to the clerk, but accompanying Miyuki and Minami as they were watching some souvenir enthusiastically, he realized that it was already lunch time.

Furthermore, when Tatsuya checked the Eidos, it seemed like there were magicians at the back of the shop. For some reason, they didn't seem to hide themselves. Thus, Tatsuya concluded that they would not escape while their group was having their meal.

"Yes."

With his nod, the clerk replied with her cheerful voice, saying 'this way, please'. Tatsuya thought——impressive professionalism, not to give over-attention to Minoru, the three others followed Tatsuya from behind. The waitress guided them to a tatami seat.

"Is this one alright?"

Although Tatsuya preferred a modern table setting, as far as he saw, they were all fully occupied. He turned to see the eyes of his companions, to check for any disagreement. Tatsuya, then, agreed to be seated there.

"Please call us if you've decided on your order."

Tatsuya nodded, and the waitress withdrew.

"For now, should we just try to have a meal first?"

"Umm, is this okay?"

Minoru wore a worried expression while asking Tatsuya.

"The way I see it, this place is a legitimate façade for their business."

"But."

"If the food is poisoned, I would surely notice that. Moreover, I managed to get a glimpse of the employer of the stalker just now. If he tries to escape, I'd see him immediately."

Minoru gasped in surprise.

"Tatsuya-san, you sure can do anything."

Tatsuya could only wryly smile at the honest remark.

"I can't do a lot of things. More importantly, how did you manage to believe in what I said so easily?"

"I can't believe that."

He was still thinking about the 'I can't do a lot of things' phrase too deeply,

"I mean, of course I believe you"

He meant to ask 'is it okay to believe you?' but ended up answering Tatsuya's query, Minoru hastily rephrased his words.

Miyuki leaked out a small laugh and smiled.

Minoru blushed openly.

"Miyuki nee-sama."

Unusually, Minami used a voice as if chiding Miyuki.

"I'm so sorry, Minoru-kun. This happened because there were no boys with normal reactions like Minoru-kun around Onii-sama and I."

"The way you said that, makes it sound like I'm the abnormal one."

At Tatsuya's instant reply, Miyuki laughed more happily and consciously.

"Onii-sama. You sounded as if you were normal, for once."

Tatsuya looked at Minoru and shrugged his shoulders.

Still blushing, Minoru also began to laugh.

Tatsuya and Minoru ordered Yudoufu[16], while Miyuki and Minami ordered Yuba nabe[17].

Speaking of Yudoufu, Tatsuya had been preoccupied with the thought of Nanzenji[18], but he was convinced that it was just a lack of research on his part as response to Minoru's explanation. In the first place, he didn't come here for touring, so there was no purpose of researching that much.

They took their time, and enjoyed their lunch. Tatsuya made some corrections to today's schedule in his mind. The main course was the Yuba nabe. The warm soy milk and noodles on the surface of the bamboo skewer. The process itself took a significant amount of time. Had he realized, he would have surely asked them to order something else, but it was already too late. In the end, it took them more than one hour after they came in to the store before finally contacting the waitress.

"Actually, Kudou-san from Ikoma has come to introduce himself, should I call your husband?"

"Kudou-sama from Ikoma, you said? Please wait while we proceed to call the manager."

First, he addressed himself with an appropriate pseudonym, to request for the shop manager. He wondered if this occurrence was rather common, as the waitress retracted immediately without raising any questions.

They were not kept waiting for too long.

"Customer, I have brought the appetizer. Sorry to make you wait."

"Thank you."

Without saying anything condescending to the clerk, Tatsuya rose from his cushion.

Though it was not a parlour, the waiting room was a combination between East and West. There was no sofa and table, instead wooden chairs with a backrest were accompanied by a lacquered table. Everyone there understood that the furniture was much more expensive than a high-grade sofa.

The shop manager——the man was an ancient magician, and he was not sitting on a chair. He closed the sliding door, before bowing deeply. He didn’t show any hostility towards them.

Tatsuya wasn’t sure if the hat he wore was a tea master's costume or a courtesy to dress appropriate to greet his customers. Without further reading into it, he sat down on the left as suggested.

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[16] Yudoufu: https://www.google.com.sg/search?q=yudoufu&rlz=1C1CHYD_enSG610SG610&oq=yudoufu&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.2377j0j7&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=122&ie=UTF-

[17] Yuba nabEdits: http://www.thejapanguy.com/what-is-yuba/

[18] Nanzenji:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nanzen-ji

The table was for six people, so there were some left over seats after all of them sat down. Tatsuya sat in the middle, with Minoru sitting behind him, and Miyuki at his side, and the seat in front of the door was taken by Minami.

They faced the manager once more. His face was covered with noticeable wrinkles making him seem to be in his early fifties. Although appearance could not be relied on too much, as there were magicians who aged particularly fast, in the first place, age was not an important factor. Someone could only stand as a leader of an organization due to his capability, it was the same even for the non-magic organizations. In fact, neither Tatsuya, Minoru nor Miyuki had ever worried about the age of the opponent.

"I never thought that I would have the chance to see a member of the Kudou Family."

The traditionalist magician, suddenly cut in. He didn't even pry into Tatsuya's groups' identity. If Tatsuya must say, he was frank, however, Tatsuya saw a lack of leeway.

"I will not ask where you come from. So please excuse me from introduction."

Miyuki and Minami thought that it was common sense, however.

Tatsuya, on the contrary, narrowed his eyes with a wary face to discern his true intention.

"…Does that mean you don't have any harmful intent towards us?"

"I have no more intention of making trouble to the people affiliated with the 'Nine'."

"Pardon my rudeness, but you are a member of the 'traditionalists, right?"

The tea master magician sighed.

"Yes, I am traditionalist shaman."

"Shaman?"

The one who reeled after hearing such unexpected words was Minoru rather than Tatsuya.

"Up to half of the Buddhist monks were not accustomed to Shugenja[19] nor Onmyoji[20]."

The self-proclaimed shaman said so with a slight snort. Traces of pride were visible in his eyes, and he soon stopped his hesitation and depressing attitude.

"So then, aren't the traditionalists formed out of hatred towards the former members of Laboratory Nine, including the magicians from the Kudou Family? To begin with, wasn't the traditionalist faction formed in hostility against the former Ninth Research Institute?"

Tatsuya returned to the original topic. It was beneficial for Tatsuya to meet this man in such a circumstance.

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[19] Shugenja: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shugenja

[20] Onmyoudou: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Onmy%C5%8Dd%C5%8D

"In the beginning, I was also angered by the way the Ninth Institute handled the matter. I thought someday I would avenge my hatred. Compared to my peers, my anger was particularly intense, so some sects raised me as a leader of a shrine which I've never belonged to."

"It was as if you are not the real leader in charge."

"I had thought of it… Although, to this day, I haven't told anyone."

Tatsuya detected his unwillingness to discuss the matter, and waited in silence for the next word.

"At first, I was thinking of serious retaliation. Although it was almost impossible. However, it was only due to the fact that the Ninth Institute was using me, it's not that I had any intention of betraying my motherland."

"While on the topic, why did you accept the exiled Houjutsu users?"

The elderly magician nodded at Tatsuya's question.

"I have not kept up the way of Nara. After they decided to become shishi shinchuu nomushi[21], …by drawing in the spells from the continent. For a Japanese magician to lay their loyalties outside of Japan, no, I can even say that they do not have a hint of loyalty towards their homeland."

Minoru was down casted at the shaman's words, unmistakably, because he knew what his predecessor had done.

"Did they have any other choice then, when their own country's ideology was incompatible with their beliefs?"

The shaman seriously shook his head at Tatsuya's mindless words.

"Loyalty is not a matter of ideology. It is a matter of sentiment."

Tatsuya nodded lightly at that statement.

"I see. That's why you cut off connection with the traditionalists at Nara, because you wanted to stop the hostility towards the former Ninth Research Institute."

"Yes. Time is a great healer. It heals all wounds. Even though it used to be unbearable."

"I think there are wounds that wouldn't heal with time, but."

"The unhealing wounds, are only wounds that revive a fresh scratch in the place where it was about to heal, and it adds up before long. Unless you continue to pour fuel over a fire, it will disappear before long, it is a similar situation."

Tatsuya sighed naturally.

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[21] shishishinchuunomushi. Literaly: insect within the body of lion. Meaning: those who bring harm while at inside and, even if those who return the favor in revenge.

"Let's stop with the abstract philosophy at this point."

He proceeded to look into the eyes of the elderly magician.

"What should we do to make you think that we aren't your enemy?"

Against Tatsuya's statement that he couldn't believe empty words, this time the elderly magician sighed earnestly.

"From what I can see, you are not even 20 yet, what kind of education led you to wither like this."

Miyuki and Minami subtly changed their facial expressions. Certainly, Tatsuya had not reached 20 years of age yet, however the phrase 'not even 20 yet' was not usually used to address a high school student.

However, the person in question, Tatsuya, did not seem to be bothered at all.

"Isn't it because of your realistic approach that you're having this conversation with us?"

The shop manager, who was a traditionalist, sighed with a gesture that made it seem like he could age a few years at that instance.

"I'm beginning to think that my judgement was not a mistake. People said that he is a skilful detective, but in the end, it's all just a rumour, or it was too much for him to be an opponent of the Kudou Family's."

Tatsuya did not think that the deployment of the detective was masterful. However, he was thinking that he should comment about something. He decided to comment about a more pragmatic matter.

"Earlier, you said that you couldn't accept the risk of employing the Houjutsu users. Can you show that it wasn't just empty words?"

"May I know what you'll need it for?"

"We are looking for a magician who was fleeing from Yokohama. His name is Zhou Gongjin. He has brought numerous disastrous misfortunes to this country."

The shaman looked up with an understanding notion.

"——I understand. I will assist you with the information I have."

"Please do."

Tatsuya replied so, to pressure him, rather than showing that he was impatient.

"The man you are looking for, Zhou Gongjin, is not within the city of Kyoto. The last time we confirmed his whereabouts was Friday, October 12th at the 'bamboo forest' near Tenryuji in the north, it was near the site of the original Buddhist sect. He seemed to be moving south, but there was no clue of him going south from Uji."

However, the clues received from the self-proclaimed shaman, weren’t so detailed.

"Do you know why they didn't come south from Uji?"

"They purposely did not cross the Uji River. There was a barrier laid in Uji to protect Kyoto."

For the first time today, Tatsuya was earnestly amazed.

"Is the whole length of the Uji River covered with a barrier? How did you manage to lay such an extensive barrier?"

Miyuki asked that question in place of her speechless brother. However, her question stimulated Tatsuya, an answer flashed in Tatsuya's mind.

"——No, it's not only limited to the Uji River, the Uji River itself became a medium for the barrier right? If you mixed your magic with the water of the river, the river itself would have the magical effect."

"Amazing! 90 marks for that!"

The elderly shaman struck a broad smile. His eyes saw Tatsuya as an equal, only this time he stared at a child with an adult’s eye, as a veteran magician, he saw that Tatsuya could be a good student.

"——The remaining ten points, rather than mixing something in the river, the deterioration of water in the river itself——has it been consecrated beforehand?"

"Oooh! How fast, although you are still a high school student. As expected, from a direct descendant of the Kudou Family."

At Minoru's supporting opinion, the elderly magician divulged lightly.

"The origin of the barrier is at Amagase Dam. We purified all the river water there. Of course, we didn't actually purify all the water in the dam. In order to do so, we would need to have 100 magicians stuck at that place for every instance."

That was impossible to do, Tatsuya and Minoru understood that well.

"However, it is only possible to create a barrier as strong as the extent of the purified water. At best, it was useful to alarm of the existence of an enemy beyond the river. However, it differed from the mechanical alarm, where you can have different settings for each operator to read the information. Moreover, it can be set to react to specific individuals."

"In other words, you are one of the operators of the Uji River barrier."

The shaman gave a nod at Tatsuya.

"It was a complete coincidence that I was taught to control the spell of that ward. It is possible that the other operators do not know that I am one of the operators. I don’t know the other operators either. However, that is not a problem this time."

The elderly magician cut his words there, leaving the feeling that he still had more to say. He must have thought that he had not withered yet, as he unconsciously attempted to show that to his younger audience.

"With that barrier, Yamashiro and Yamato would not be shaken. As for me, since the day Zhou Gongjin appeared in Kyoto, I have watched the barrier from the time when he would tread beneath it again."

"For what purpose?"

"That man is a dangerous existence for this country."

The traditionalist leader answered Tatsuya's question clearly.

"Although I just said that 'time will heal all wounds', to be honest, even now I have not discarded all of my ill feelings towards the former Ninth Institute. Had you guys stormed in and interrogated me instead, I would never have discussed about the barrier or Zhou Gongjin’s whereabouts in this way."

The shaman looked at Minoru, Tatsuya, Miyuki, Minami one by one, before fixing his eyes on Tatsuya.

"However, you have kept the minimum courtesy. I must say that you were fairly hasty from my point of view, but I would not want to shed blood unnecessarily."

This coincidence was truly a blessing, Tatsuya thought while listening to the shaman's words. Tatsuya didn’t press further into the store, since Miyuki and Minami had wanted to eat lunch. The reason why there wasn’t any blood spilt was due to the fact that Mikihiko, a barrier operator, was not together with them.

Of course, he didn’t honestly say so. That would not have been honesty, but foolish honesty.

"Thank you for your valuable information."

"Another thing, please be wary of the parties at Kurama and Arashiyama. It seems like they have completely merged with magicians from the continent."

Tatsuya bowed and rose. Miyuki followed her brother with a short delay.

Minoru and Minami bowed their heads and got up hurriedly. The elderly magician saw that with a smile in his face.

When they left the store, the sun had begun to shift. Although there was still time before sunset, it would soon be dark during this season as the days began to shorten. Especially on the west side, this trend could clearly be observed. There was a sense of accomplishment and not the empty feeling of going on a fool's errand, and certainly there wasn’t much time left today either.

"What should we do now?"

On the downslope approach to the shrine, Minoru asked Tatsuya. If he believed the words of the shaman, it meant that Zhou Gongjin had already left this area.

"The northern side of the Uji River is too wide of an area to search with five people. We need more clues."

"Then, shall we head to Arashiyama?"

"I think so..."

At this instance, Tatsuya recalled the news reporting about the murder of Saegusa Mayumi's bodyguard. The place of the incident had been written as being the Katsura River.

Tomorrow, he would investigate the murder scene with Mayumi. Mayumi had asked the police if she could collect some of Nakura-san's belongings, but even if she managed to get those things, the most important thing to do was to visit the crime scene. The lead was in Arashiyama, and it was certainly a good option to examine the area, however his time was limited to one night. He also thought that it would be counter-productive to search in the same area for two consecutive days.

"Let's investigate Arashiyama tomorrow, for now, let's head back to Kinkakuji."

"I understand. I'll contact Kyoko nee-san regarding the Uji matter."

"That's good. Please do."

While the attention of the crowd had not changed after the lunch——they were still focused on Miyuki and Minoru——Tatsuya's group decided to take the commuter from Sakanoshita.

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Mikihiko, Erika, Leo and Masaki just finished the questioning process with the police, they were released under the recognition of legitimate self-defense. Undeniably, the Chiba name was also one of the strongest decisive factors in acquitting the records from the pre-installed street cameras in the area. Although it was harder to detect Ancient Magic by sensors, the fact was, only the operator would have difficulties, the scene was still recorded in the same way. One can easily state that magicians had showed up, both ancient and modern alike, it wasn’t possible to escape from the Psion radar associated sensor in conjunction with the camera.

After quite some time, the questioning ended, the four of them returned to the New International Convention Center.

"What are we going to do next? I don't feel like anything else is going to happen today, should we do another search of the perimeter?"

Mikihiko quickly shook his head at Leo's question.

"No, let's go back to the hotel for today."

"That's right. Don't listen to the fool, nobody will come out again for today."

"Agh? Who did you call a fool!"

"I wonder~ Who was it? Anyway, why are you angry?"

"Thi-, of, oh, wel-…"

Leo glared at Erika, Erika looked away with a relaxed face.

Masaki had asked Mikihiko 'should we say something?', but Mikihiko shook his head. 'Just leave them alone'.

"By the way, Ichijou-kun, which hotel are you staying at?"

Mikihiko seemed to be uncomfortable in the silence, and asked Masaki about another topic.

"Ah, the KK Hotel."

Masaki seemed to be taken aback by the sudden question, but he dutifully answered.

"I see~ We're staying at the CR Hotel."

"Really? Aren't they next to each other?"

"Yeah, what an amazing coincidence. Is Kichijouji-kun at the hotel?"

If Tatsuya was the one who asked this question, Mikihiko would obtain a sigh as an answer. He would say 'there are times when Miyuki and I are apart' with an additional amazed tone put in. However, Masaki politely answered Mikihiko’s question.

"No, I've said this earlier, I came here alone. George is concentrating on the preparations for the competition. He is one of the representatives of Third High."

"I see."

The representatives of the Thesis Competition were to be extremely devoted to the preparations of the presentation, so Mikihiko, Erika as well as Leo didn’t ask about Kichijouji any further.

"We are going to go back to our hotel, Ichijou-kun, how about you?"

"Let's see…"

Masaki wasn’t really taking a pause to think. He was also thinking to check out different places like Tatsuya, in other words, he still wanted to look around other places. However, he couldn't split up since he came alone, unlike Tatsuya's group. He also didn't need a guide. He visited Kyoto quite frequently, since it didn't take a long time from where he lived. Hence, there was no need of a guide for navigation purposes, however there were enemies that he wasn’t aware of, who made him run around the area.

However, he spent a significant amount of time in police interrogation, the troublesome process had killed off his motivation to do anything else for the day.

"I shall go back to my hotel as well."

"Then, why don't we go together?"

While he thought that it was a little blunt, Mikihiko invited Masaki to get into the same commuter as them.

"We have just the perfect number here, right?"

Mikihiko and company had seen that Erika had stopped teasing Leo for a change of pace, and suddenly they were talking about other topics.

Masaki's incongruous attitude recalled the confusion. Apparently he wasn't thinking to join them and wanted to decline Mikihiko politely.

"No, actually I rode a bike here."

"Oh, Ichijou-kun also rides a bike?"

There were a lot of girls that showed interest when Masaki rode on his bike. Many of them had a longing to ride together with him, Masaki was aware of this vaguely. However, he didn’t understand the reason.

Even in this era, the bike had retained its from. The two seater robot starter with two seats arranged side by side was popular in itself, but the circumstances still favored the classic arrangement which allowed a girl to cling on to the boy's back, it stimulated a girls dream.

"Me too?"

However, Erika's interest was clearly different from those 'dreams of girls' that he remembered.

"Tatsuya-kun… Umm... You know Shiba Tatsuya right? Tatsuya-kun also rides one, it was quite cool."

"He does?"

An image immediately floated in Masaki's mind. A boy drove a bike with a girl on his back. She was not straddling him, it was rather elegant. The girl's hand encircled the boy's waist, and the girl's body was completely glued to the boy's back.

The face behind the helmet was Tatsuya. The girl, was Miyuki, of course. Masaki was involuntarily divulged in his imagination.

His focus was shifted from the boy's face. The smoke shield gradually rose. Masaki's face changed. He could feel Miyuki's tender body on his back…

"What are you thinking?"

With her curious voice, Erika forced Masaki to end his imagination abruptly.

"N-No. It's nothing."

Masaki frantically shook his head, while tightening his face. Erika looked at him with a pair of evil eyes, it was impossible not to notice, and he looked at Mikihiko's face.

"Since that's the case, why don't you follow us from behind?"

"Of course, I don't mind doing that…"

Mikihiko thought, what exactly happened, but he didn't voice his thought.

Erika who had diverted her eyes was also putting up a puzzled face like Leo.

Leo faced Erika and shrugged his shoulders lightly.

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They also visited Kinkakuji just to be sure, they didn’t get any results even after checking the surrounding area. Tatsuya's group went back to the hotel early, with a sense of futility as they didn’t even find the sites of the traditionalists.

The hotel where Tatsuya's group stayed, was close to the Kyoto New International Convention Center, the venue of the Thesis Competition. Although it was inconvenient, the First High Thesis Competition members and staff were expected to stay here, the pretext they used this time was to check the security of the venue. Even though some students would come and stay here to cheer for their schools representative, it was not unusual for them to stay at the nearby temple or shrine.

It should be noted that Minoru spent his time at the inn. Although there wasn't any need for this, considering the travel time to his home was short, it seemed to be the correct decision, since Minoru was sick.

Since magicians are severely constrained in their private travel to go abroad at a younger age, it was normal to travel with friends within the country. However, Minoru found it hard to travel for a long period due to his weaker constitution, on top of that, he also didn’t have any friends who were close enough to be a companion. This time, even though Tatsuya didn’t come to Kyoto to play, the family had thought that this was a good opportunity for Minoru.

By the way, the room was supposed to be shared between Tatsuya's group. Minoru was an add-on, but it wasn’t so much different with three or four people inside, since the room he reserved for the boys was of a two to five person occupancy.

Tatsuya was about to check in while taking the luggage that had been stored in the lobby, he saw familiar figures in the group from the entrance when he was walking to the counter. Although they hadn’t made any arrangement to meet up, it was not so strange, as it was a high time to return to the hotel.

However, Tatsuya found an unexpected face in it, he couldn't help but raise his voice.

"Ichijou."

"Shiba-san."

The person in question should have reacted the same way. However, Masaki didn’t raise his voice.

Tatsuya and Miyuki looked at each other, Tatsuya smiled wryly while Miyuki responded with her smile.

"Long time no see. Ichijou-san, you've come to Kyoto as well."

"It's been a long time. I’m on a preliminary check for next week's Thesis Competition."

Masaki transformed into a naïve boy in front of Miyuki as usual.

"I see. So are we."

"Yes, I heard so from Yoshida-kun and the others."

Nevertheless, he had become more familiar or working hard, for the conversation to go smoother.

"Did you meet Yoshida-kun's group by the New International Convention Center?"

He had difficulty saying that he helped them from danger, as it sounded like he was boasting. Masaki let Mikihiko answer the question.

"He helped us when things got dangerous."

Yet, the answer came from Erika instead.

Masaki and Mikihiko, even Leo gave a wry smile. Since Masaki asked the others to answer, he didn’t feel any discomfort. However, he thought that this freedom suits this girl very much, Masaki had understood that about Erika this much.

"Please tell us the full story in the room."

Tatsuya try to refrain from chattering. Unexpectedly, Masaki noticed first, and Erika nodded in agreement.

"Ichijou, are you staying at this hotel as well?"

Miyuki asked Masaki in a roundabout way for the sake of Masaki's convenience.

"No, I'm staying at the neighbouring KK Hotel. However, I think I want to know the details and circumstances first."

Masaki parked his bike before following Mikihiko's group again, he was concerned about the circumstances behind the previous attack. He thought of the same thing as Tatsuya.

"Then, let's talk in our room."

Leo encouraged so.

"Then, I'll fetch the luggage~."

"Wait a minute."

After giving the answer, Erika and Leo went to the front desk. Mikihiko chased them from behind.

Masaki didn't know that Tatsuya was a part of the JSDF. So the explanation must be done well to cover that part up. Erika, Leo and Mikihiko thought so.

"The perpetrator of the Yokohama Incident last year, which involved the invasion of the GAA magicians has been detected in Kyoto. I've come to Kyoto on a mission to search for that person."

"Mission!? Shiba, who are…?"

"I am a student from the National University Affiliated First High School, at the same time, also a member of the 101 Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion from the JSDF as a secret military officer."

However, Tatsuya himself gave away the secret information easily, which made the three people shocked.

"What... The."

Even though Masaki was the man to be the next head of the Ichijou Family, it didn't keep him from being surprised.

Yet, he had not allowed the words 'you're lying' to escape his mouth. He immediately absorbed those words as the truth.

He was refrained by Miyuki's serious look, she was seated next to Tatsuya.

"Ichijou. I don't need to say this, but this is a top military secret."

Masaki could only nod since he didn't manage to skip the shock.

Erika's eyes stared into the far distance. She was thinking, "This was Tatsuya-kun's plan…" and "I was forced to be involved in his circumstances, in the same way…".

"According to their information network, it seems that there is a possibility for a disturbance to arise during the Thesis Competition. Mikihiko and the others have been asked to ensure the safety of the competition."

This was the first time Erika and Leo heard this. The purpose of this trip was to specifically seek out an enemy magician, rather than a mere preliminary inspection, they could have received grievous injuries from the enemy's attack, had they lowered their guard, they'd surely have died.

Yet, the two of them took in this story calmly. Had they been told about this earlier, they would have declined this trip. Both of them thought of this at the same time, and shook their heads in denial.

Perhaps, the most upset one this time was Masaki.

"Do you know the name of the person who had… guided the invasion army?"

Even so, Masaki still asked the most important question. He stared at Mikihiko strongly, while expecting the answer from Tatsuya. Mikihiko, too, still hadn't known about this information.

"He is called, Zhou Gongjin. He appears to be in his early twenties. However, his real age is unknown. He has long hair, and his appearance is as it looks in this picture. He is a user of the Kimon Tonkouno-jutsu."

Surprisingly, Tatsuya gave his name upfront.

"You said, Zhou Gongjin!?"

Masaki raised his voice, it seemed to be more of a surprised for him than Mikihiko.

"Ichijou, do you know Zhou Gongjin?"

At Tatsuya's returned question. Masaki was still surprised.

"Ah, ah… I see, so it's him. It's him!"

A fire of anger had started to light in Masaki's eyes. The fire swirled into a flame.

"What happened?"

This wasn't only a coincidence. He was reacting with a considerable level of boiling anger.

"…Last year in Yokohama, part of the invasion force fled to Chinatown. I led the siege against them."

Tatsuya had asked to read the Yokohama Incident reports, yet he had never heard about this story. Masaki didn't mean to hide it, it was simply due to unorganized information. Though Tatsuya secretly thought to get a glance of that record once more.

But now, it was his turn to listen to Masaki's story.

"Contrary to my expectations, the gate to Chinatown was immediately opened. The invasion force was handed over to us, restrained, by the young man who was in front of the residents and identified himself as…"

Masaki gritted and tightened his teeth.

Tatsuya spoke the name in Masaki's stead.

"Zhou Gongjin, huh."

"Yes. He said that it was his real name while laughing…"

Masaki shut his mouth. Since he could understand his feelings, he didn’t voice out anything this time.

"What kind of magic is Kimon Tonkouno-jutsu?"

The one who changed the topic was Erika. Albeit coming from her pure curiosity, no doubt, she did it with Masaki in mind.

Moreover, it was necessary to keep and share information about the enemy's magic.

"It is the Kimon Tonkou[22] from divination arts, right?"

Mikihoko asked, looking for confirmation.

"Yes. It is a magic art from the continent, the art of Kimon Tonkou, in essence is Spirit Interference Magic that derails orientation."

The one who answered was Minoru.

"Derails orientation? Like, you wouldn't know up or down in the water? Or it makes you drown?

Minoru showed an impressed expression at Leo's question. That idea, was so novel that it didn't even cross Minoru's mind.

"You certainly can use it that way, but the main usage is to disrupt the consciousness of the individual, to cause psychological damage that he isn’t keeping up in time, despite seeing the culprit, or being led to wander endlessly through a camp of piled up stones."

"…Kudou-kun."

"You can call me Minoru, Ichijou-san."

The introduction between Minoru and Ichijou ended immediately after they entered this room. He also proposed the same way to address him to Masaki, since he was younger than Masaki, he preferred to be called by his name instead.

"Understood. Minoru-kun."

However, Masaki refrained himself from overstepping since it didn't look manly.

"Isn't that similar to the legend of Shokatsu Koumei[23] from the Three Kingdoms?"

After he called Minoru by his given name, he proceeded to ask so.

"Yes. The Ninth Research Institute didn’t only study the Ancient Magic of Japan, but also that of the continent."

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[22] Kimon Tonkou no jutsu (Ghost walker in the anime) :http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qi_Men_Dun_Jia or http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%A5%87%E9%96%80%E9%81%81%E7%94%B2

[23] shokatsukoumei: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhuge_Liang

Tatsuya thought that it was a given. The magician’s development institute was the most sought activities during the 20 years warring period. Since the foreign Magic Sequence such as 'Golden Electron Silkworms' had become a real threat, it was natural to examine it.

From the former researchers of the Ninth Institute, Shokatsu Koumei have a high likelihood in mastering the Houjutsu of Kimon Tonkou, the report seemed to be concluded as such.

Erika wore an impressed face to Leo's analogy of the unexpected celebrity. Since Tatsuya had no interest in military losses, he tried to shift the conversation back on track before it deviated too far.

"Kimon Tonkou is not only a large-scale spell, isn't it considered a high skill for personal combatants? I think we’d rather be worried of this instead."

"For example?"

Tatsuya didn’t retort 'think yourself' at Masaki's question.

"Anyway when one side has stopped their movements while exchanging blows due to him losing the sight of the opponent during a battle, changing location vigorously will lead to a fatal gap."

However, before he reached the end of his explanation.

"I see. If our orientation were derailed, we wouldn’t even know which direction we’d be facing."

With Masaki as his counterpart, any further explanation wasn’t needed.

"At the same time, it was also probable that his own allies would be affected by the spell, and lose their sense of direction. Kimon Tonkou might cause them to lose sight of their own enemy."

"That is also a possibility. Miyuki."

Miyuki opened her mouth promptly after her brother's reply.

"Ichijou-san. I was confronted with the same Kimon Tonkou of spell at the Kanto branch of the Magic Association by someone called Chen Xiangshan."

"Is this true?"

"Yes. However, I was only looking at the surveillance monitor, certainly I wasn’t able to see him closing in when I walked down the corridor. I should have been looking at the same scene from the monitor's, yet only the monitor was reflecting the correct situation."

"How do you beat that magic, Shiba-san?"

Tatsuya glared at Masaki after his query and said 'as expected' in his mind. Asking 'how' instead of 'why'. Although it was not pointless to ask 'why', but the most important thing in the combat was to ask 'how'.

"I was together with a friend who has a pair of special eyes. I received directions and timing from her, and was waiting for the door to open."

Masaki had fallen into his thoughts. Tatsuya waited for him to open his mouth again.

"That means... Kimon Tonkou isn't really independent of time? The essence of the magic is to direct the opponents consciousness to a particular direction, or interfering with the mind as to avoid their awareness. However, if we know at which point they would reach at a certain time, I think we could predetermine the direction in advance, we can prepare our minds and resist the mental interference induction."

"As expected of you, Ichijou-san."

Minoru spoke of praise after hearing Masaki's reasoning.

"Not only does it interfere with orientation, but one's sense of timing as well, it's a combination of Mental Interference Magic. It is the most logical explanation so far."

Minoru looked for affirmation, and turned to Tatsuya.

Tatsuya nodded lightly to Minoru.

"Enough with the interpretation of the magic art, Ichijou, can you think of any specifics in responding to this?"

"Then, we must not rely on our senses to predict the movement of the opponent."

"About a specific method, each of us should think of a way on our own."

Tatsuya pretended to issue a lifeboat to Masaki, as a follow up of the Kimon Tonkou conversation. Tatsuya had heard from Kuroba Mitsugu that Kimon Tonkou was useless against opponents at a visible close range, it certainly made sense to talk about methods to disable this magic.

"Let's halt the discussion of Kimon Tonkou here, regarding today's incident. The battle you've won with the help of Ichijou, Mikihiko has been using Shikigami to detect the 'traditionalists' who are harboring Zhou Gongjin, I think they were trying to investigate us, and ended up attacking us by mistake."

"Not only that, Tatsuya."

After Tatsuya finished explaining to Masaki, Mikihiko opened his mouth.

Both Tatsuya and Mikihiko turned their faces to Mikihiko. Of course neither Miyuki, Minami nor Minoru were at the scene.

"The enemy who attacked us was a Ninjutsu user. Most probably, from Mt. Kurama, they've absorbed the Houjutsu users from the continent as their center. Isn't Zhou Gongjin hiding over there? He might have taken over the traditionalists' sect now after firstly being sheltered by them."

"Not the traditionalist's sect, but a part of the sect."

This time, Mikihiko gave Tatsuya a 'What do you mean?' look. Erika, Leo, and Masakai followed after.

"Actually, it’s still a little early for us to say. The clues are also a little weak, but we've narrowed down the possible area where Zhou Gongjin might hiding."

Before Mikihiko could even show his amazement, Tatsuya talked about the traditionalists 'shaman' whom he met around Kiyomizu Temple.

"To have installed such a barrier… As expected of the land of the old traditionalist magicians."

Mikihiko responded as such when he heard about the Uji River barrier.

"The southern part of the old capital means… South of Fushimi, from the Uji River onwards. It’s still quite a huge area for a detailed search."

"In the first place, can we believe that old man's words?"

Masaki and Erika had raised an, 'in the first place' question.

"It's still much easier than searching all over Kyoto vaguely. Moreover, we knew of his hiding place up to last week right? If you check that place, you can easily find out if you can trust that old man right."

Leo returned a positive opinion, Tatsuya showed a wry smile favourably.

"The fact that Zhou Gongjin hid at Mt. Arashi and the evidence that the traditionalist magicians provided at Kiyomizu Temple is undeniable. I have some theory’s that mix some lies with the truth to make his story credible."

Erika directed a wicked smile at Leo.

Before Leo had the chance to react, Tatsuya continued speaking.

"However, I agree with Leo's opinion that we can believe the information about Zhou’s hiding place at Mt. Arashi. If it was the truth, it is a great lead, if it was a lie, we still cand keep the confusion to a minimum."

"Then, Onii-sama, are we all going to Mt. Arashi tomorrow?"

Surprisingly, Tatsuya shook his head before answering Miyuki's question.

"If we all go together, we'll attract attention, the safety of the competition also cannot be neglected. Mikihiko, Leo, and Erika will do the same thing as today, look for suspicious individuals in the venue's surrounding, please investigate if there are places where criminals and terrorists can lurk around."

"…Understood, Tatsuya."

Mikihiko didn’t seem to be fully convinced, yet he couldn’t afford to neglect the safety of the students who would participate in the Thesis Competition as First High's Public Morals Committee Chief.

"I have asked my family to file a complaint against those who were at Mt. Kurama for today's attack. They also reported this to our affiliates in Kyoto. About this attack from Mt. Kurama, and also some dogmatic strife within their sect, I would think it might become a checks and balances system for the future."

"First of all, what kind of situation was it?"

Tatsuya hadn’t heard the details about the attack, it was quite late in the conversation to ask this kind of question.

"Now that I remember, I haven't shared the details with you."

Mikihiko spoke with a 'damn it' facial expression.

Mikihiko described that Masaki helped them when they were attacked by the puppets used by the Ninjutsu users from the continent, while occasionally asking for confirmation from Erika and Leo.

"...Did they use the blood of the defeated Ninjutsu user to shape the golem from water? From what you've said, the Ninjutsu users were also likely have been deceived by the Hojutsu users."

Minoru turned immediately, curious of the answer to Tatsuya's question.

"I think so too. Yoshida-san you have the power in you, blood in particular has an important meaning for ancient magicians. When you use it to generate magic, it would act as an offering, I don't think that the ritual could be complied with lightly without any side effects."

"Then I'll make this short."

Masaki opened his mouth this time.

"The shaman at Kiyomizu seems to hint that the ancient magicians have become minions of magicians from the continent, they were being deceived rather than forced to surrender by force, so it's good as long as we can find proof that they're being deceived. Regardless, it might still be impossible to make them our ally, so long as their hostility stops, it’s good enough."

Tatsuya nodded at Masaki's proposal.

"The greater the commotion is, it will also reduce the chance of Zhou Gongjin from escaping. I think it's better to crush the enemy while spreading confusion and speculation about him."

"It's our loss if he manages to create mayhem like last year, are these all or nothing conditions?"

Masaki threw in the question to Tatsuya.

"I'm fine with acting as a representative from the Kudou Family, however, I don't think that I alone can represent the houses of 'Nine' to stimulate such a big population of both the traditionalist magicians and the ancient magicians in Kyoto."

"You're right. You’ll provide an excuse for the traditionalists that way, it's best to avoid that."

Minoru spoke with a regretful tone, and was comforted by Miyuki who supported his decision.

"The complaint from the Yoshida Family will probably be a just a constraint for the traditionalists. Regardless of what we do next, if they plan to become violent, they will do so."

Mikihiko nodded in agreement with those words.

"That's right… Understood. Then, we will do the same thing as today, to look around the perimeter of the competition venue. We should focus towards the residential area, just to be sure."

"What should I do?"

Masaki asked Tatsuya. Tatsuya couldn’t respond to his 'what should I do' question with a 'do as you like', even when he had no power to dictate Masaki. However, the situation would turn murky if he actually said that.

Anyway, Masaki's feelings were obvious, he was glancing at the shimmering Miyuki.

"Ichijou-san, we encourage you to accompany us if you're willing to."

Miyuki answered proactively for her brother. It was due to the fact that she was asked to accompany them instead of asking permission to join them. —— Nevertheless, Masaki thought that she was very motivated, yet, she didn't have a hint of such thoughts.

"Yes, please leave it to me!"

With this, the course of action for tomorrow was decided.

Chapter 8

The next day, Sunday, October 21st. The investigation scheduled for the day continued in two groups. Yet, Mikihiko was in a better spirits than yesterday, since his friend had revealed the true purpose of this trip.

Tatsuya, Miyuki, Minami were going with Masaki and Minoru to Mt. Arashi, while Mikihiko, Erika and Leo were going to Takaragaike, towards Matsugasaki. The eight of them planned to gather at the hotel early in the morning.

However, the situation took an unexpected turn.

“...I’m sorry, Tatsuya-san.”

Minoru said so from the futon with a pitiful voice. He suddenly had a fever this morning, it was a completely unpredictable situation.

”Don’t mind it. It’s not your fault, Minoru.”

“Nevertheless... I feel really pathetic.”

Hanging onto words of consideration from Tatsuya, Minoru frowned as contrary to the hotness of his face.

”Minoru, you don’t need to blame yourself. You’ve done well so far.”

The only ones who were in the room were Tatsuya and Minoru. The other members with exception of the two had been waiting in the lobby.

”I’ve heard that you have a weak constitution. That is not of your will, I was willing to receive your help with understanding of this possibility.”

Minoru averted his eyes from Tatsuya.

”You’ve helped enough. We wouldn’t have been able to go to that shaman’s place yesterday, were it not for your help.”

“...Really?”

While averting his face in front of Tatsuya, Minoru answered with a weak voice.

“I do really think so.”

Minoru returned his line of sight to Tatsuya timidly.

Tatsuya’s expression was surly as usual. He did not wear a compassionate smile, nor the fake smile that was full of lies in his face. Tatsuya’s face was as sincere as his words.

“You have been very helpful, you should not force yourself now. That way, you’d be more helpful in the case of an emergency later on.”

”Am I still... Tatsuya-san’s friend?”

”At any rate, we won’t reach Zhou Gongjin’s place today. We’ll need your power by then. That’s why, you can rest for today.”

“…Understood.”

Minoru smiled weakly. Although he was still depressed, at least he had stopped blaming himself.

”I’m going to let Minami stay behind. She can do universal household chores. Feel free to rely on her, since Minami will also enjoy doing so.”

Minoru showed an embarrassed expression. He probably had other reasons than a fever for the blush on his face. Perhaps, he was ashamed to receive help from someone who rejoiced over it.

”Please watch our belongings while we are away.”

This did not mean that they would immediately go back to Tokyo after their investigation, it was only until they came back here again.

“Leave it to me.”

Minoru seemed to understand Tatsuya’s kindness, he floated a smile.

After Tatsuya went out from the room, he met with Minami who had been standing there alone, and talked to her.

”Sorry to trouble you, please take care of him.”

“It is no trouble at all. This is part of my job. Please leave Minoru-sama in my care.”

Minami answered while bowing, Tatsuya headed to the lobby where Miyuki and his friends were waiting.

When she couldn’t see his back anymore, Minami knocked at the door of the room where Minoru slept.

Without waiting for his reply, Minami opened the door with the electronic key that was entrusted to her by Tatsuya. Minami had no intention in disturbing the sleep of an ill person just for that.

She closed the front door, and opened the sliding door, where Minoru tried to rise from the futon. Minami ran to sit by his side without any sound, she was pressing both of his shoulders gently as to let him lie back down.

“Minoru-sama, please don’t mind me. If you do so, there is no meaning in me taking care of you.”

Minoru felt that those words were coming out of a villain who tried to blame him for overdoing things. However, no matter how hard Minami tried, she wouldn’t be able to treat Minoru that way, it seemed like Minoru had misunderstood Minami’s true meaning.

”I understand. Then, I will dutifully sleep.”

This time Minami wore a disappointed expression.

Minami sat beside Minoru while staring at him motionlessly, she sat with aligned knees as the correct manners dictated.

After 30 minutes passed, Minoru's closed eyelids suddenly opened, and he smiled wickedly.

"Sakurai-san, if you keep staring at a man like that, it's quite embarrassing, even for me."

He should have been accustomed to being stared at due to his good looks. Yet, he felt like his liberty was affected in this private close proximity, and the fact that his sleeping face had been observed intensely.

"Pardon my rudeness!"

Minami lowered her head to touch the mat in apology with 'uwaaa' voice, she also set two meters distance between them to be seated.

Her bright red face which was facing down on the tatami mat was not visible to Minoru.

As for Minami, she had not meant to stare at Minoru's face. It wasn't like there was anyone else in the room to talk to, and she thought it was rude to the patient if she read or watched videos, in fact, she was only dazed without any significant thoughts in her head.

However, after hearing Minoru's words, Minami even doubted her own actions with a 'was that true?'.

The things that Minoru said about her staring at him.

Minami questioned herself, 'was I really staring intently at him?'.

—— 'And if I did, what did I do that for?'

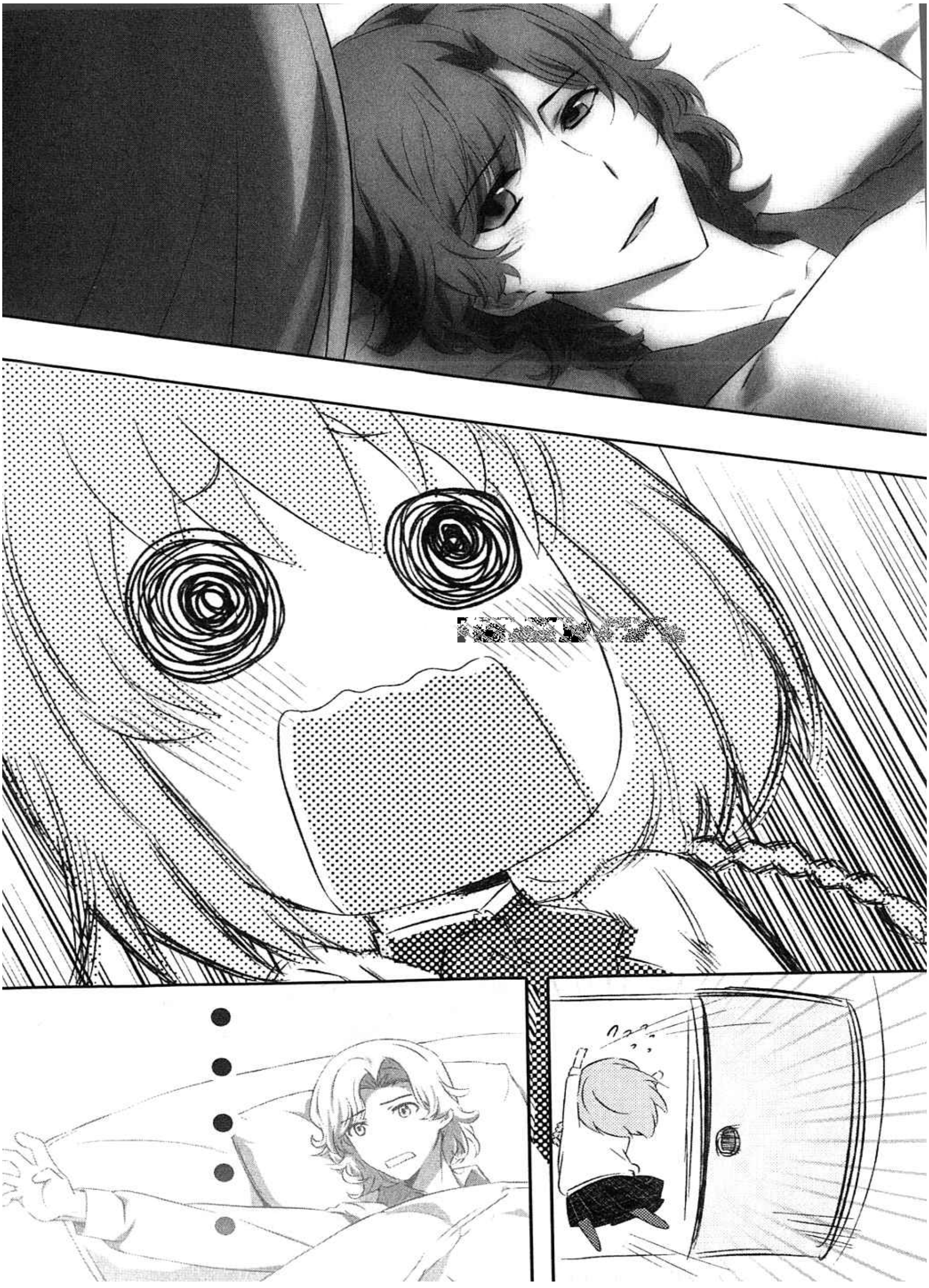
Her face which had been red became more and more blushed.

Even Minoru who was lying down could see that her ears had turned red, Minoru was worried about Minami's physical condition since the dogeza pose that she had maintained seemed to have burdened her much.

"Ehh, umm… are you ok?"

Minoru was about to rise.

"I'm alright! Please continue your rest!"



[redacted]

She was pushing with a strong tone on the verge of screaming as compared to the gentle push of her hands earlier, Minami rose noisily and went out of the room while hiding her face.

She closed the sliding door forcefully. Yet, still leaving a little gap.

There was no sound of the front door being opened or closed.

Minoru seemed to be solidified for a while, with a hand stretched towards Minami who had now gone.

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Although in the original plan Tatsuya's group had consisted of five members, since Minoru was sick and Minami stayed behind to nurse him, in the end they had three members, the same as Mikihiko's group. And Masaki who was supposed to follow their commuter with his bike, since the commuter was only a 4-seater capacity, they ended up riding the commuter together.

The two seats in front were occupied by Tatsuya and Masaki, while Miyuki was seated in the rear alone. Honestly, Masaki wanted to sit beside Miyuki, yet he suppressed his real intention and sat next to Tatsuya, since he prioritized common sense and manners in this situation.

The one who set the destination was Tatsuya. Masaki had agreed on going to Mt. Arashi during yesterday's meeting, hence Tatsuya proceeded directly to the parked commuter without even stopping to think twice.

"Shiba, aren't we going to Mt. Arashi?"

"We're going to get some clues before going there."

He answered Masaki while turning back, Tatsuya looked back at the foot outside the car.

"I want you not to talk about Zhou Gongjin from here onwards."

"...Is it supposed to be a secret?"

"I do not want to involve that person, if possible."

Masaki returned with questioning eyes at Tatsuya. Tatsuya suspected that Masaki misunderstood his words, but they had already reached their first destination. Furthermore, Tatsuya didn't feel any need to give an excuse.

It had been three minutes since Tatsuya's group arrived here.

"Tatsuya-kun, I'm sorry for making you wait."

"No, you are right on time."

Tatsuya said so to assure the female college student who had rushed from her commuter.

"Huh? Miyuki-san?"

"Good morning, Saegusa-senpai. I didn't get to meet you last time, so 'long time no see'."

Mayumi's eyes were wide open, while Miyuki smiled at her.

"I didn't expect that Miyuki-san would be coming along."

As she said, Tatsuya did not tell Mayumi that he was not coming alone.

However, Mayumi had to restrain herself from using her usual sarcastic tone due to the presence of the other companion.

"Ichijou Masaki-kun, right? This is the first time we have the chance to do self-introductions. I'm Saegusa Mayumi."

Instead of showing her wanton behaviour in front of Tatsuya, she introduced herself as a daughter of Saegusa Family from the 10MC.

"I remember your face. I'm Ichijou Masaki."

Masaki replied with a hint of nervousness. As both of them said, this was not their first meeting. Nevertheless, it had been four years since their last greeting and this meeting was their second. Although they both knew the other party as a celebrity in the magic world, otherwise, it would be weird to remember about each other.

"I'm sorry, Ichijou-kun... Tatsuya-kun, come here for a second."

Mayumi retreated away from Masaki with a dazzling feigned smile, while winding her right arm to Tatsuya's left arm——not with any visible sweet intention——she pulled Tatsuya. After distancing herself about two meters away, Mayumi began to cross-examine Tatsuya in whispers.

"Tatsuya-kun, why didn't you mention that Miyuki-san would be coming along?"

Tatsuya showed a natural amazed face.

"I don't think you need to ask specifically about this. Didn't you expect me to come together with Miyuki?"

In a failed attempt to refute, Mayumi showed a 'giving up expression'.

"That's right…There's no way Miyuki-san would let Tatsuya-kun go alone, right."

She shook her head in exasperation, before suddenly turning back to her serious expression. Her sight was fixed upon Masaki.

"Then, I wonder why is Ichijou-kun also coming along."

"That is a total coincidence. Yesterday, Yoshida who did a preliminary investigation of the surrounding area for the Thesis Competition met Ichijou who had the same purpose. Since he has been wandering around the venue to look for suspicious people, I brought him along in place of a bodyguard."

“So Yoshida-kun and others are also here… Ah, of course, he is the current Public Morals Committee Chief after all.”

“You are well informed.”

Without speaking out his real intention, Tatsuya was trying to say ‘you’re well informed despite having graduated’, Mayumi shot an ‘I won’t be cheated’ look at Tatsuya. Seemed like Mayumi knew that Tatsuya had a habit of trying to find something that could be used against her.

“Then, does Ichijou-kun know about my situation?”

“I have not received such permission from senpai, I won’t blabber anything unnecessary.”

Suspicion dwelled in Mayumi’s eyes, they had become increasingly distinguished.

Tatsuya also noticed the suspicion that was directed at himself. However, Tatsuya couldn’t be bothered about it.

“Anyway, senpai, do you really not want to explain the situation to Ichijou? I think he is someone you can rely on.”

Tatsuya flakily made a smile at Mayumi.

Mayumi sighed heavily.

“I wonder if it’s wise… To use the only son of the Ichijou Family under your chin.”

“I’m not using him under my chin. In the first place, he wasn’t even that cute of a guy.”

Tatsuya answered with a disappointed voice, Mayumi giggled and smiled.

“Ok, I will gladly accept his help then.”

He finally scored, Mayumi might take it that way. Yet, she regained her mood, and gave permission for Tatsuya to explain the situation to Masaki.

Led by the detective on duty, the four of them entered the evidence storage room in the police station.

Masaki showed a surprisingly positive attitude when he heard that she wanted to search for the culprit who murdered Nakura. It seemed like he expressed a great sympathy in (what he interpreted as) the investigation to dispel the chagrin of the bodyguard. As a future head of a family of the 10MC, the thought of (what he interpreted as) using a subordinates as a mere tool seemed to touch his heart.

Usually, this variance of purpose was not preferred. Since the ancient times, there was a saying `He who runs after two hares will catch neither’[24], this was a predictable proverb. However,

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[24] Nitowooumonohaittowomoezu, literaly: to chase 2 things and obtain not a single one; meaning: when you chase 2 goals by greed, in the end you will get neither of them.

Tatsuya had a premonition. Rather than based on his reasoning, this time he was betting on his ‘hunch’.

——Zhou Gongjin was the one who murdered Nakura Saburo——

Tatsuya had that conjecture. That was why even when Masaki inflamed his chivalry for Mayumi, it was not really conflicting his purpose. Therefore, he felt no inconvenience.

While he was thinking about the matter, the detective came back with Nakura’s belongings on the table.

“These were the clothes which were worn by Mr. Nakura on that day. Unfortunately his CAD…”

Nakura’s CAD was obviously retained by Kouichi. A CAD was not only useful for those who knew how to adjust it, but also an amazing research material to know about other magician’s magic by analyzing it. Thus, it was natural in the magic community not to pass such an important secret to non-relatives.

However, Mayumi remembered the guilt covering Kouichi when he recovered Nakura’s CAD. In fact, it was possible to analyze the flow of the battle to a certain extent by examining the CAD. It could even uncover the state of the battle at the time, and guess the kind of damage that the enemy received. Further possibilities included narrowing the suspect list by investigating the patients who visited hospitals to receive treatment for grave injuries. It was a common practice for magicians not to let the CAD fall into the possession of others, but it might be due to the fact that Kouichi was not so cooperative with the police, or rather, blatantly uncooperative.

“Excuse me, Keiji-san[25]. Whose blood is this?”

The detective replied with a rueful shake of his head.

“Unfortunately, all of it is from the victim.”

Even though it was not easy to examine all the blood stains on the victim’s clothes, modern forensic technology had made it possible. To investigate all of the body fluids on the victim’s body for a hint of the perpetrator was a basic procedure in all murder case.

“Nakura-san’s abdomen was pierced from behind, his chest muscle burst out from within, and his heart also ruptured.”

Which was why it was reported as a strange corpse.

However, the newspaper had not reported such details. Tatsuya learnt this from Mayumi.

“Burst from within…?”

Masaki voiced out with a deep suspicion.

“It was as if he was ‘exploding’.”

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[25] Keiji: detective

“No, Shiba! The Ichijou Family is absolutely not involved!”

Confusion floated within his mind during his conjecture, making Masaki show an excessive reaction.

Hearing such a loud voice within a closed room, Mayumi knitted her eyebrows lightly.

Tatsuya was not seriously doubting the involvement of the Ichijou Family.

“However, there is no natural phenomenon that can explain how one’s chest can burst from within, to control bodily the fluid of a human, a magician to boot, I think there isn’t any other magic that could manipulate the momentum of the burst to be strewn over this way.”

The purpose of this discussion was to sort out the information.

“That’s…”

——Even so, it was a tough situation to be in.

“The Ichijou’s ‘explosion’ is not something that can be copied so easily though.”

“Of course! Ah, but still.”

“Calm down. I only said that it looked like he ‘exploded’. I didn’t mean to put any special meaning in the word ‘explosion’, I don’t even doubt that the Ichijou Family is not involved.”

Masaki blushed faintly, realized that he had been distraught, and he was probably ashamed to be scolded. Tatsuya saw that as ‘this guy’s personality took a weak turn against an unexpected circumstances’.

“Magic which interferes with another individual’s body is difficult to be applied. However, it is not so difficult if it’s applied to your own body. For example, self-acceleration is a fairly popular magic.”

Mayumi opened her mouth.

“Tatsuya-kun, do you think that Nakura-san exploded him——killed himself?”

Mayumi questioned Tatsuya timidly, and Tatsuya shook his head.

“Even if he did explode himself, he did not commit suicide.”

“Onii-sama, do you think that Nakura-san chose to explode himself since he already had a fatal wound?”

Tatsuya nodded to Miyuki who was beside him.

Before returning his sight to Mayumi.

“I think the ruptured heart was due to some sort of side effect from his magic.”

“He must have already received a mortal wound from behind that pierced through his abdomen, so he simultaneously attacked the murderer with this magic?”

“Senpai. Did Nakura-san have a special magic with liquid as his weapon?”

After answering Masaki’s question, he turned to ask Mayumi.

“…I’m sorry, Nakura-san had never really used his magic in my presence.”

However, Mayumi failed to answer that question.

“I see.”

Tatsuya did not answer with a disappointed voice.

However, Mayumi heard his patience wearing thin in his reply.

“Ah, but I heard something when I first met him. Wait a minute.”

Mayumi folded her arms, while thoughtfully humming ‘umm, umm’.

(Somehow… She ticks like a manga character.)

Before Tatsuya thought that ‘it might be rude’, Mayumi made a revelation gesture with her hand.

“Now that I recall, Nakura-san was good at magic to make needles from water.”

Masaki knitted his eyebrows.

“Water needle? How? And what kind of effect would it result in?”

“I’m not sure how he did it, I wonder if it supposed to pierce through something since it was called needle. If you applied a convergence type system to water, it could even securely gather force at a practical level for a weapon.”

Masaki was annoyed at the involuntary uninteresting answer, and was about to ask another question. However, right on that instance, he remembered that Miyuki was present.

“…That means, the victim turned his own blood into needles and shot the perpetrator, huh.”

“A counterattack at the price of his life...”

Tatsuya stored the information of Nakura’s blood from the remnant of his clothes with his Elemental Sight.

“Shiba, what are you doing?”

“I was checking if there is any other magical trace at the area of the abdomen wound.”

“I see…”

The one who squinted his eyes due to Tatsuya’s plausible lie was not only Masaki, but also Mayumi. They actually detected a usage of magic instead of observation with the five senses, to recognize magic with one’s eyes was the most direct analysis.

“Umm, nothing left.”

Mayumi dropped her shoulders in disappointment, Masaki also sighed heavily.

“Me too. I can feel some traces here, but the pattern is just too blurred to be understood... Shiba, did you find anything?”

“I can’t obtain any specific clues to specify a certain individual. However, this injury was probably caused by a genjuu[26].”

“Genjuu?”

“Onii-sama, what is this genjuu?”

Mayumi and Miyuki sought an explanation of the alien word. The detective behind the two of them was seen taking notes.

Tatsuya tried to impose upon Masaki to take the explaining role, yet Masaki casually denied his invitation. Either he did not know about the matter, or he was just tired of explaining things.

Since the one who asked was Miyuki, he’d probably answered it enthusiastically if he knew. Hence, Tatsuya interpreted that Masaki, most probably, also did not know.

“Genjuu is a kind of kasei-tai. It reflects the light that comes into contact with the body through magic, which causes a pretext that it possess an entity[27] and even applies pressure to the object. It shows a shape to the enemy via an illusion by reflecting the light. Therefore, it also has an effect to fit into a created form, the same as a Kasei-tai.”

“Kasei-tai can be seen by everyone since they reflect physical light. However, genjuu utilizes magic from the Spirit Interference System, it will only be visible to the opponent intended by the magician. Am I right?”

Tatsuya gave a satisfied nod to Miyuki’s explanation.

“That’s right. You’ve explained well. These type of illusions are not restricted to visuals. There are also established genjuu spells for auditory illusions.”

“Wait a minute, Tatsuya-kun. If I digested this properly, you said that genjuu would not form if it’s not recognized by the opponent?”

“The main difference between genjuu and Kasei-tai is found in the Magic Sequence that affects the opponent to think that there is ‘something’.”

Mayumi did not fully comprehend this, her face was filled with questions.

“If that’s the case, then why did the attack come from behind? He would have realized if there’s noise. If it materialized behind him, Nakura-san should have realized it if the distance between them was close enough, he shouldn’t have ended up getting pierced from the back.”

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[26] Genjuu: cryptid or mythical beast

[27] Entity → real body/substance

"He did not necessarily notice where the creature was."

"What do you mean…?"

"In the case of genjuu, it can work even without clear recognition from the opponent. Since genjuu do not exist fundamentally, if one see its shape clearly, one will know that it is an illusion. As long as anxiety is risen, against some unknown creature, that will give strength to genjuu which is a phenomenon that is not supposed to exist in reality.

"…I don't really get it."

"I'm sorry, did I confuse you? To put it briefly, his enemy firstly imprints a recognition magic of the shape of the beast that would give a pretext that he was going to be attacked by something, which in turn causes the enemy's magic to get stronger. It didn't even matter if the first illusion shown was only a kasei-tai."

"By getting alarmed by the enemy's magic, he strengthened the power of his opponent…?"

"If you understood this, the effect is reduced by half. The effect was as you've seen in the remnants of Nakura's clothes."

She lowered her head lightly in appreciation of Tatsuya.

Mayumi was puzzled to the point of not knowing how to react.

The four of them rode on the same commuter and went to Mt. Arashi. (The commuter that Mayumi used had headed with other users upon release, since it was unmanned for quite some time.)

The front seats were taken by Tatsuya and Masaki, while Mayumi and Miyuki sat behind.

Once the commuter started to run, Masaki talked to Tatsuya.

"Shiba, about the genjuu earlier."

Neither Tatsuya nor Miyuki had ever mistaken who he was referring to. Masaki called Tatsuya with 'Shiba' without any honorific, while calling Miyuki with 'Shiba-san'.

"Are they different than the 'Kugutsu-shiki-oni' that we'd encountered yesterday?"

"I've also never heard about Kugutsu-shiki-oni before."

Tatsuya sat in the front seat, but the commuter did not require him to drive since it was automatically driven. Hence, there was no problem to shift his line of sight.

"Nevertheless, you should have heard of Golems, since it's quite common. You should be able to discern their differences by their name right?"

"Ichijou-san, Onii-sama, sorry for disturbing your conversation."

Miyuki leaned lightly from the rear seat. To be more exact, she grabbed the back rest of the front seat and shoved her head forward.

“Onii-sama, I also only know Golems by name, do you mind explaining briefly about some of its characteristics?”

Tatsuya shot a questioning stare for a moment. Golems were popular in the Christian and Jewish culture. Miyuki who had also received an education about foreign magicians who were less likely to ‘only know it by name’.

However, he noticed his sister’s eyes were glanced towards Masaki, so he noticed her real intention. He did not think that she was a busybody, he didn’t even waste his effort to do so. Tatsuya began to explain about Golems a little bit for Masaki rather than Miyuki.

“Golems are made by embedding parts from a number of organisms or a monster with a independent information body that is programmed to mimic the legend, it continuously changes the relative position of each part in addition to convergence-type magic, a magical robot that reproduces an organism-like behavior.”

“For example, a titanic golem stone soldier. At first glance, it only looks like a lump of hard stone joined together, yet once it moves, it mimics human movements. However, it was not due to a wholly connected system. It is similar to fortifying magic, the magic is only for securing a relative position. In short, each part of the body is only piled up on top of one another.”

“As a consequence, golems would be irregular, depending on the substances that formed its body. Inorganic material such as water, or organic material such as wood, alike. However, it has every capability affiliated with physical materials, unlike kasei-tai and genjuu.”

“To move the golem, it is necessary to embed an independent information body behavioral pattern program. If the magician stopped supplying Psion’s, the magic sequence for the golem would stop working. If the magician himself were beaten, the golem would also lose its power. This is also applied to those which are created from a formless material, such as water, the golem will just collapse in the aftermath.”

“For wood or stone based golems, they are often used in the engraving magic technique to affix the magic type. On the other hand, the amorphous materials based golems, such as one that is made of water, it is used as a magical communicator that requires the magician to continue casting the magic over and over again. Yesterday’s golem was rather small and disposable, it was presumed from the blood of the Ninjutsu users as the communicator.

“Before Modern Magic was established, blood had been considered an important magical tool. The Ancient Magic seen is a highly effective offering, and there are many magics’, which require blood as a medium. In Modern Magic, the Eidos of blood is directly connected to the life support of your body, including the brain, which records the details of the Psion property of the owner in high density. Therefore, it can be said that blood is very suitable to project a magic.”

“…In short, the difference between genjuu and Kasei-tai to golem is in the existence of its entity?”

Mayumi summarized Tatsuya's explanation in one sentence, she might feel that it started to get cumbersome.

"After I heard your explanation, I think that the golem which has an entity seems to be easier to deal with."

Tatsuya shook his head lightly in response to Masaki's opinion.

"If only Kasei-tai and genjuu were strong enough, there wouldn't any need for troublesome and inefficient biological forms. In fact, the magic was centralized in the narrow range of its nucleus, and can be erased easily if you destroy the nucleus. Or you can simply destroy the force field which shapes the virtual image. Moreover, golems are much more useful in terms of physical strength, it possesses destructive strength for physical work."

While they were having this conversation (through the one who was mostly doing all the talking was Tatsuya), the commuter ran closer to their destination.

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Minami read quietly beside the sleeping Minoru.

Aside from his fever, his condition was stable. There wasn't any household chores to be done at the hotel, and there was no need to compete for preparing the meals and teas either. Minami was finally in a relaxed mood after a long time.

Still, she was together with a young man——or a boy with the same age, just the two of them. Moreover, the other party was superbly beautiful, so she was feeling impeccably content. Yet, she was wondering why she felt this relaxed.

It shouldn't be because she was used to Miyuki. Both her and Miyuki were——though sometimes she did not think that——female. Minoru was a male. Of course she would feel different about him.

Moreover, the visit to Nara before, and yesterday, too, when she was nearby Minoru, she had been really nervous. She was aware that she was nervous. It was by no means due to the fact that he was a 'son of the Kudou Family' that she had been kind of nervousness. Most likely, because she saw Minoru as a member of opposite sex who was of the same age as her. He was a 'boy' as contrasted to Tatsuya.

He had great magic power, and could even be said to be a tremendous one. He might even stand on par to the Yotsuba's masterpiece, Miyuki.

His looks were also extraordinary, which didn't need to be said at this late hour.

Yet, why did she feel a sense of familiarity. Somewhere inside, she felt just like him. She was attracted to him, she was aware that Minoru was aware of this, which resulted in her nervousness.

Minami held both of her cheeks with her hands. She blushed as she was ashamed of her delusion. She stood to cool her head, and went to wash her face.

However, she immediately returned to her position. Not for reading a book, but a seating pose beside Minoru. She noticed that Minoru's breathing was suddenly raged.

His breath was short and painful. His hand was getting hotter. Minami rushed to call a doctor, but she stopped in the middle.

Minoru was from the Kudou Family. A magician who inherited the bloodline of the former Ninth Laboratory. I wonder if ordinary doctors would be allowed to examine him?

Minami wavered. Minoru's illness was certainly not to be nursed by an amateur. Nevertheless, she could not decide if she can call the doctor by herself.

A solution flashed in Minami's mind.

She wanted to ask Tatsuya.

Minami hurriedly retrieved her information terminal, and launched the voice communication function.

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Tatsuya received the call from Minami right after he got off from the commuter.

"How is Minoru? I see. You made the right choice for not asking for help from the front desk. Contacting Fujibayashi would be the best choice… Yes, no problem. In fact, she told me in advance to contact her if something happened to Minoru. I asked for you to do simple nursing since she's probably heading to the hotel now… No, I didn't give him any medicine… Ok, that's good. It's probably a little troublesome for you alone to do it, but I'm counting on you… Yes, I'll leave it to you."

Miyuki looked up anxiously at Tatsuya who had just finished the call.

Moved by her gaze, Tatsuya called the number that had been registered in his information terminal.

"Fujibayashi-san? This is Shiba. Actually, Minoru is sick now, and Minami is nursing him, she said that his breathing looks painful... CR hotel, room XXX… I'll leave everything in your care."

"Was that just now Kyouko-san?"

From the side, Mayumi's voice came out with an anxious tone.

"Has Minoru-kun's condition worsened?"

Questioned by his sister, Tatsuya nodded in silence.

"Shiba, is it ok for us not to go back?"

Masaki asked so with a serious face. They had just met yesterday, but he seemed to be seriously worried about Minoru.

"I've contacted his relative, she will reach the hotel in about one hour."

"Sudden illness? Kyouko-san's relative?"

Mayumi hadn't met Minoru yet.

"The youngest son of the Kudou Family. He was helping us out as a guide around Kyoto for a little while before."

"The Kudou Family's last son, is he that Minoru-kun? I heard he has a weak constitution."

It was surprising that Mayumi knew about Minoru. As expected of the eldest daughter from the Saegusa Family, rumored to be the most socialized in the 10MC.

However, even for Mayumi, she still did not know about Minoru's constitution. From the information she received, she imagined Minoru to have a similar constitution to that of Itsuwa Mio. Since Mayumi often visited Mio, she had been preconditioned to associate everyone with poor health from Mio's appearance.

"He is sickly, but he doesn't look frail. I haven't heard from his doctor, so I don't know much about the details, but it seems like his magical power is too strong that it causes an excessive load on his body."

"…Can such a thing happen?"

Mayumi tilted her head with a puzzled and skeptical face, while Miyuki showed her face from the other side to see what was happening.

"At any rate, since Fujibayashi-san is rushing there, we can proceed with our planned investigation."

Mayumi was acquainted with Fujibayashi. Even before the Yokohama Incident last year; from the relationship between their houses. Of course, she knew the situation of Fujibayashi Kyouko and the Kudou Family.

On the other hand, Masaki did not know a thing about Fujibayashi. Yet, he didn't add on any extra comments from his mouth.

Nakura's corpse had been discovered across at the river bed of Katsuragawa[28], right beside the Arashiyama[29] district at Nakanoshima Park. Just before the Katsuragawa River, towards the south, there were small sandbars scattered.

The site of the police investigation seemed to be over; Tatsuya was able to enter the site without any problem. Of course, there were no blood stains that remained. Although, using Elemental Sight might help to trace and verify the data which he had obtained earlier, Tatsuya decided not to waste any effort there.

"Was it here?"

"Yes."

Masaki asked, Mayumi nodded. Masaki was quite optimistic for this investigation.

"This much momentum, it is unlikely that he was shed from upstream."

Miyuki said so while looking at Tatsuya. Tatsuya thought, apparently, his sister had poor skills to be a crime detective.

"That's a possibility that probably doesn't exist."

Tatsuya stopped his answer there, he didn't say the following words, that there hadn't been any signs of a trail of blood to be found in this area.

"Shiba, what do you think of the situation? Was Nakura-san approaching the criminal that stood here, or did the perpetrator approach him after Nakura-san arrived first?"

"I don't know."

Tatsuya immediately answered Masaki.

"The conclusion wouldn't come out even after we think about it. In the first place, we don't know if Nakura-san and the perpetrator had made an appointment to meet up, or if Nakura-san was just attacked randomly by the criminal."

"…Certainly."

Masaki did not show any useless rebound, and seconded Tatsuya.

"Onii-sama, what should we do now?"

After Miyuki asked him, Tatsuya turned to Mayumi.

"I want to investigate the surroundings a little bit, do you mind?"

Mayumi was surprised from the sudden offer, and answered, 'Yes, I'm the one who asked for your assistance, if you have anything on your mind, I will follow it'.

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[28] Katsuragawa: Katsura river

[29] Arashiyama: Mt. Arashi

Tatsuya did not stay by the Katsuragawa river bed, but headed upstream across the Togetsukyou Bridge. Rather than going back, it was further forward in the direction of the Arashiyama district at Kameyama Park; there was a small warehouse at the peak of the eastern part of Mt. Ogura.

Tatsuya headed there according to the clues obtained from the shaman he met at the tofu shop nearby Kiyomizu Temple, the place where Zhou Gongjin had been hiding. He did not tell that to Mayumi, but she was following him without any complaint.

Autumn had deepened, Mayumi was overdressed in her own way with a pair of sandals. In contrast with Miyuki who wore long pants and sneakers, Mayumi wore heels with long sleeves and a long dress. She mustn't have fully understood what they were going to be doing and just dressed confidently, still it wasn't an extreme up and down hiking course.

Inevitably, the four of them moved at a slower pace.

Within the park, in the slope area, there was a sign stating of a 'bamboo forest'. Tatsuya headed there without hesitation. Mayumi found it to be uncomfortable that she hadn't found any hesitation in him.

"Hey, Tatsuya-kun."

"What? Are we moving too fast?"

Hung with Mayumi's voice, Tatsuya halted his feet. Masaki and Miyuki also halted together.

"No, we don't, but."

Now that he mentioned it, Mayumi noticed that she was starting to lose her breath. She could understand that Tatsuya's and Masaki's breath would not be affected, but even Miyuki did not show any sign of fatigue, she found this unreasonably indescribable.

"Tatsuya-kun, do you have any place in mind? You seem to be very sure of where to go since earlier."

After Mayumi pointed out so, Tatsuya realized that his attitude was certainly unnatural as she had said.

He wanted to dispose of her suspicion, not because he wanted to continue his lies, but he didn't want to involve Mayumi. To Minoru, he said that he was a direct descendant of the 10MC officially since the first time they met, Masaki was also not suspicious after his involvement, since they hadn't had any excessive contact more than usual. However, Mayumi was a close friend. It would feel awkward once she got dragged into his own circumstances. Although she wouldn't ask Tatsuya to 'take responsibility' over the matters, but she would end up lending her power to Tatsuya. Tatsuya did not want to break the appearance of him lending his assistance to Mayumi, this was his lie.

He was troubled without much to say.

He wavered for a second.

Only for a second, since he had no time to do so the next second.

“Onii-sama!”

Miyuki extended her interference area.

The onibi’s that flew towards them disappeared, swallowed by her magic. The Ancient Magic ‘Onibi’ was not a physical fire, it was a magic with visualization of fire. There was no way that it could possibly breakthrough Miyuki’s interference area.

The enemy seemed to perceive that well, and pounced the wind blades next. However, it ended up the same. Whether they be blades or compressed air blades, he must maintain his magic continuously under the strong interference.

“Ichijou!”

“Leave it to me!”

Tatsuya attacked from the front, with Masaki behind. The two people took their stance to protect Miyuki and Mayumi.

Thin straps extending from the left and right of the bamboo grove towards Miyuki. Blue, red, white, black, and yellow breaded with 5 colors.

Tatsuya caught it before it reached Miyuki.

Waves similar to Cast Jamming came out from the braid.

(Esoteric system trap from Ancient Magic rite!)

Unlike Cast Jamming which scattered the Psion noise to inhibit magic activation in space, this method effectively sealed the opponent’s magic by pouring the noise directly through the string.

Tatsuya decomposed the noise without disassembling the strap itself. He tore the string apart with his own hands.

Tatsuya had strong physical power, yet he did not boast superhuman strength like a juvenile villain. Originally, such a strap might need the brute force of two people to haul it in each hand. However, it stunned their opponents, now that they’d seen their magic was broken in such an unexpected way. Tatsuya used that chance to figure out where they were hiding.

Tatsuya raised his guard. Furthermore, he noticed that someone had disappeared. Tatsuya assumed the barrier was erected to protect themselves from him and his friends, but the barrier was made to prevent the public from entering the area.

However, it was to their convenience too, that they had no worries of being seen by the public.

The strap extended to Masaki and Mayumi, Masaki pushed it back with a gush of wind.

The wind itself hadn’t affected the magic actuation inhibitor sequence in the strap, since it was a product of magic.

The bamboo in the forest buzzed violently, the leaves danced in the wind.

Mayumi activated her magic. It was the original form of her specialty ‘Magic Shooter’, the magic that rained a hail of dry ice, ‘Dry Blizzard’.

Carbon dioxide concentration in the air was 350 to 400 ppm. About 3/10,000 to 4/10,000. It was within normal standards, in fact, it did not contain less than the common area. However, this number only accounted for up to 10,000 meters in the troposphere, and it’s possible to form the dry ice from pressurized carbon dioxide only within two meters.

Components of the air were evenly distributed in the atmosphere. When the distribution was disrupted by magic, the Eidos would try to rectify this. Targeting a specific gas in a narrow area, in this case, collecting the carbon dioxide, and concentrating them together. Since nature tried to rectify this phenomenon, the concentration of molecules in the area where the magic was activated would cause the airflow which replaced the gas molecules to decrease.

The magic to make dry ice was a carbon dioxide convergence process, the gas molecules were replaced with a speed which exceeded the speed of sound. It was an interesting phenomenon to be observed at the microscopic level. Yet, the event modification triggered by the magician didn’t actually change the configuration of the macro-gas molecules at the atmospheric level. The technique focused on unilaterally converging carbon dioxide, which was the raw material for the dry ice; in a narrow area, the world will immediately procure the raw material shortage in order to counteract the effect of the natural phenomenon modification caused by the magic.

Hails of dry ice stormed in the bamboo forest. Its speed was 500 to 600 km/h which was far slower than the speed of sound. The bullets were also much lighter as compared to lead bullets. However, they had been hardened by magic and were enough to pierce through human flesh.

Six men came out of the bamboo forest in a hurry. There weren’t any serious injuries, perhaps due to the magical shield to avoid the dry ice bullets. Still, there were traces of blood on their limbs.

On the other hand, two magicians were dragged out by Tatsuya, and immediately Miyuki activated her magic to drop the temperature of their bodies into a point of hibernation. His sister had some resistance towards killing others, hence, Tatsuya struggled to actuate the limiter for her magic power.

Tatsuya used his hand, forming a karate chop pose with Decomposition Magic. Ha hadn’t brought with him his Silver horn this time. He wore a specialized CAD in bracelet form on his wrist instead. He could add multiple directions to the antennas which in turn, would provide a similar effect to a short sighted auxiliary support.

The CAD that was attached to his chest used thought-operated input commands. This forced him to use a new fighting style which didn’t require the use of his hands during combat.

After all, at this distance, Tatsuya could activate his Decomposition Magic even without a CAD or sight auxiliary. His aim was, the bamboo above the head of the person in hiding whose

Psion's were detected earlier. There might not have been any blood splatter from the blow, but the magicians' decided to close their eyes.

Since they shut their eyes, the traditionalists couldn't verify the identity of their attacker. They had understood that this deliberate attack was a warning. It was not an indiscriminate attack, which meant hiding any further wouldn't serve any purpose.

Soon after, they decided to show up, four traditionalist magicians came out of the bamboo forest. Including the two that he had dragged out earlier, there were 12 assailants detected, yet another one was still missing.

"Ichijou!"

"Leave this to me!"

Tatsuya knew very well the extent of Masaki's capabilities. He was never worried about Masaki in the first place, and now he reaffirmed that such a worry was baseless. Tatsuya focused to take care of the four opponents in front of him.

In front of Masaki, there stood six magicians. He knew that the opponents were of the traditionalists Buddhist sect beforehand. Thus, there was no confusion in his preliminary action.

From behind Masaki, a sign of magic being activated could be detected. Mayumi was ready in position to use magic.

Masaki and Mayumi both had distinguished power.

The 10MC, the eldest daughter of the Saegusa. A rival from first high, the former student council president who was considered a genius in long-range shooting precision magic.

However, Masaki had no purpose to fight Mayumi.

The technique earlier, Dry Blizzard. Masaki found out by sight that she purposely reduced the power.

Although as a result, she failed to neutralize the opponent. It did manage to smolder the enemy, but Masaki thought that was due to the idiocy of the opponents.

He wondered if she was not used to the battlefield. The older traditionalist magicians appeared in front of them.

Ancient Magic had inferior speed as compared to Modern Magic.

This was an undeniable truth.

The traditionalists from the Buddhist sect knew about this. They were developing a technique called 'Ichijishu' that could activate magic with a much faster time, close to the activation speed of Modern Magic.

Nevertheless, it was still impossible to surpass the speed of Modern Magic. Modern Magic was created by fusing ESP and magic, and it was fast.

Masaki thought so.

However.

“Down!”

Masaki directed his favorite gun-shaped CAD, the traditionalists cried simultaneously.

Immediately, Masaki’s magic started to take effect, the right hands of the traditionalists lit up in fire.

“What!?”

“What the heck is this!?”

They didn’t think it wasn’t an illusion. No, it was not. The men’s clothes were already on fire. First from the right hand, to the elbow, they were burnt black, before the unpleasant smell rose to Masaki’s and Mayumi’s nose, the smell of burnt protein.

“Ugh…!”

Mayumi held her mouth. She seemed to have a nausea due to the smell instead of the sight.

Masaki was staring at the sight and forgot to pull the trigger of his CAD.

From the right hand that was still burning, a sword of flame was coming out.

The flame swirling around the sword, a double-edged stick, wrapping around it like a dragon.

If Mikihoko had been present, he would have identified the sword.

Kurikara Sword[30], and.

Two people held the swords, and they plunged at Masaki.

The four of them, they had no time to ask any questions. Masaki put his specialized CAD into his right hand and operated a general-purpose CAD on his left wrist to put up a barrier.

However, this barrier was easily torn down by the sword in a single swing.

Kurikara Sword was a Kōmanoriken[31]. It cut through the ‘magic’. By that logic, it had the power to cut through the phenomenon that was altered by magic.

“Impossible!”

While his barrier was torn apart, Masaki shouted in reflex.

The sword swung in front of his eyes.

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[30] Kurikara-ken: Buddhist sword of wisdom, cuts through 3 passions, desire, anger, and confusion (http://fudosama.blogspot.sg/2004/11/kurikara-sword-of-fudo-myo-o.html)

[31] koumarinoken: the sword of acala that made the devil surrendered

A gust of wind blew from the side and hit the two traditionalist magicians.

“Ichijou-kun, slash the magic!”

In spite of the few words that were said to him, Masaki understood Mayumi’s warning. The gust of wind was created by a phenomenon modification. Not the magic itself, it was a result of an ongoing phenomenon re-writing process. The effect of the flaming sword, fell short.

Masaki re-gripped his red CAD which had fallen from his right hand.

The Magic Activation Selector was placed on the trigger.

Their right hands were getting thinner——burnt down over a period of time——the six traditionalists raised their flaming sword all at once.

The look on their faces expressed anguish.

Masaki fully understood that these magicians had no conscious of what they were doing.

——These magicians were only flesh puppets.

——In place of the threads which manipulated marionettes, he used magic to manipulate their limbs.

Masaki pointed his red CAD at the bodies of the six puppets.

——The magic which controlled them was slashed?

——My ‘Explosion’ should not have resulted in such a lousy thing.

Masaki pulled his trigger six times in succession.

The dolls protected the flaming swords with their bodies. It was a poised magic defense.

Neither Masaki nor Mayumi knew what good that would do.

After all, it had no meaning.

The feet of the traditionalists who were just meat puppets had burst open.

Red flowers bloomed.

The flowers bloomed in the air, due to the red blood cells which were scattered from the skin after the plasma was vaporized.

Masaki adjusted his ‘Explosion’ power, and purposely used it at an un-fatal level just to neutralize the opponents.

In no time, each of the traditionalists had a leg that burst open one after another.

Burst open.

Burst open, again and again.

Six red flowers bloomed, which were immediately scattered by the wind.

The six magicians fell miserably to the ground, with one of their legs bursting open.

Due to the severe pain they experienced, the fire in the swords had extinguished.

Their right hands had carbonized from their elbows; little remained.

One of their legs had ruptured, blood vessels, muscles and skin, with the exception of his bone which turned to shreds.

Mayumi held her mouth at the ghastly sight.

Quite an obstinate young lady from the 10MC, as the usual reaction would have included some vomiting.

Masaki turned back to face her, there was neither hesitation nor regret on his face.

The same phenomenon occurred before Tatsuya.

The four magicians' hands were lit on fire.

The difference was here.

Those hands were covered by white mist.

The flame tried to resist the cold air, the cold air went over the skin and burnt them.

The magical flame that was supposed to burn, succumbed to the overwhelming 'magic'.

Needless to say, it was Miyuki's magic.

Miyuki's magic could freeze the spirit itself, it wouldn't be difficult for her to freeze a Magic Sequence.

Tatsuya pointed to the enemy's feet.

The blood from the four enemy's thighs had blown all at once.

The defeated magicians overturned. The noise of pain arose and shook their control strings.

Vibrations propagated in the reserve direction.

(Over there.)

Tatsuya looked sideways through the bamboo forest, with an unvoiced glare.

A disturbance from in the thread was caused by a Psion, no Psion waves could escape Tatsuya's 'eyes'.

He turned his right hand in the direction of the bushes.

He dealt with the spiders who had rained over his head with his left hand.

The spider disappeared without a trace, simultaneously, a scream from the bushes was heard.

“This still feels awkward.”

Tatsuya soliloquy said so, he tried the prototype of the fully thought-operated CAD bracelet ‘Silver Torus’ instead of the Silver horn specialized CAD (Torus meant ring rather than Taurus), he was commenting about the combination response.

“Seems like it will take quite some time to master it smoothly.”

However, Miyuki mentioned a reverse evaluation.

Both of them had something else to think about, namely the scream behind the bushes and the six people who laid before their eyes. However, Tatsuya knew that the Houjutsu user wouldn’t be able to escape due to the pain, Miyuki also believed that there wasn’t any prey that could flee her brother.

Tatsuya threw the Houjustu user that he had dragged out of the bushes. The man was quite old, he appeared to be at least in his 60’s.

The Houjutsu user was forced to regain consciousness violently. He stabbed himself with a long needle through his waist, apparently shutting off the pain from being shot at the thigh. Tatsuya wondered if it was a kind of acupuncture method.

The Houjutsu user only did that, he did not resist any further. It seemed like he was hit by a wave of pain again the moment he tried to use magic. He was hesitating as if he should beg for mercy or if he should just give up.

“Tatsuya-kun, Ichijou-kun, what should we do with them now?”

Tatsuya faced Masaki.

The first one to open his mouth was Masaki.

“Originally, I would interrogate this man, but.”

Masaki saw the Houjutsu user who is an old man that sat down on the ground with a defiant face. The only one who still conscious among the assailant group was only this old man.

“He doesn’t seem to be able to give a straightforward answer, since they’ve been defeated, the Ancient Magic ward should also have collapsed.”

“People… Might come, huh?”

“That’s right. I think we can claim that we counterattacked them in legitimate defense, but… their charred right arms was their own doing.”

“However, an interrogation done by civilians like us is not recognized. We are likely to get arrested due to suspicion of… Torture, unfair arrest, intimidation, assault, right”

“Exactly my thought.”

“Tatsuya-kun, what do you think?”

"While I don't think that we'd get arrested, I agree with the other arguments. More importantly, let's try to ask for a wise detective to hand them over to."

Mayumi pondered while frowning her eyebrows, before giving up and sighing.

"Let's contact the police."

"Senpai, I will contact the police."

After saying so, Miyuki took out her information terminal.

"Miyuki-san, I'll leave it in your care."

While Miyuki called the police, Mayumi and Masaki kept their sight on her.

They were not aware that Tatsuya was watching the Buddhist sect traditionalists that laid on the ground.

Both of them also did not realize that Tatsuya did not focus his eyes on the injuries.

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In the end, Tatsuya's group investigation of Mt. Arashi ended with being questioned by the police.

Their wounds must have been too severe. The detective who handled them didn't seem to complicit things even under the name of Saegusa and Ichijou.

Moreover, the detective in charge seemed to be a little antagonistic towards the 10MC, he even purposely looked for their mistakes.

Detectives in charge of magic crimes were mostly magicians, but not all were Modern Magicians. In the eastern area, where Modern Magic influence was strong, the police force was also dominated by modern magicians. However, in an area like Kyoto, where there were a lot of Ancient Magicians, they also made up a considerable number of the force, sometimes even more than the modern police officers.

The detective that questioned them was an ancient magician from the Yin-Yang System. Although he was not related to the Buddhist sect, his strong antipathy towards the 10MC, without a doubt, was affecting the investigation. He kept insisting that they were excessive in their defence, it was quite a mentally exhaustive process. However, Mayumi and Masaki seemed to be able to handle this much, lest they would reach their boiling point and turned everything into a disaster.

Tatsuya had his hands full in suppressing Miyuki's outburst against the detective who doubted them and even told them that they used excessive force in their own defence.

When they were finally released from the police station, Tatsuya had a significantly lowered tension and returned to the hotel. Fujibayashi was waiting in the room. ――Masaki was going to the station with his bike to travel back to Kanazawa, he rode a long-distance train where he could mount his bike. Mayumi stayed back at the hotel, as she had already booked a room.

"Tatsuya-kun and Miyuki-san, both of you look somewhat tired."

After a light greeting, the first sentence that came out of Fujibayashi's mouth was this.

"We were detained by the police."

"The police? What on earth did you do?"

"We'll talk about that later. More importantly, how is Minoru's condition?"

Tatsuya asked so while sitting in front of Fujibayashi. Miyuki also sat beside her brother.

Minoru had slept. Judging from his sleeping face, seemed like he had calmed down.

"He slept after the medicine worked. He was suffering quite a bit until not long ago."

Fujibayashi answered with a clouded face. From her facial expression, it could be seen that it was not 'a little misfit of health'.

"...Hey, Tatsuya-kun. Can I ask you a favour?"

"What is it?"

Tatsuya returned the question to Fujibayashi.

She averted her eyes subtly, hesitating to answer the question.

Fujibayashi told the content of her 'favour', after the long hand of the clock had rotated a single round.

"It's about Minoru-kun's body."

Tatsuya listened to Fujibayashi in silence.

"This child, had undergone all sorts of medical check-ups and was declared healthy. Even from his nervous system to his immune system, there are any anomalies. Yet, why is he so susceptible to disease, even the doctors couldn't figure out the reason."

"Second Lieutenant, I don't have any medical knowledge, you know?"

"If that were my goal I would go see a hermit monk instead."

"Naturally. Then, what is it?"

"I… not only me, but all the researchers from the Fujibayashi Family have the same opinion of the source of Minoru's weak constitution, I suspect that the reason lies in the Psion-body."

The Psion body, was one of the various names for Eidos, which records physical information, it was a flesh-like existence. In theory, it should be called an ethereal body, however that conclusion has yet to be concluded.

The Psion body is backed by the body itself. Humans are trained to control their body movements regardless of Psion's through the nerve pulses which conduct the movement of the body. Furthermore, by controlling the information of the parts that were linked with the internal organs, it was possible to fix the visceral function, or even to strengthen them.

For magicians like Tatsuya, the idea of upsetting the Psion body that modulates the body was simply an impossibility.

"What would you like me to do?"

The Psion body can affect the body. It was a popular idea in the magic community. In fact, many researchers did some studies on this subject. The Fujibayashi Family's researchers would be one of them. Tatsuya had never thought that he would be asked to investigate the matter himself.

"I want you to take a look at Minoru-kun's Psion body with your Elemental Sight."

Tatsuya was flooded with unexpected feelings. Not only Tatsuya, but also Miyuki who had been sitting beside him in silence.

"As far as I know, Tatsuya-kun, you can analyse the Psion information body. However, it is entirely up to you to do it. I'm not asking you to cure Minoru-kun's constitution. I just want to know of the cause."

That was right on the spot. It was not unnatural for her to think so, as she knew of Tatsuya's power. However…

"Lieutenant Fujibayashi. Do you fully understand what it means to 'show' me that much information?"

Tatsuya's eyes read the information, 'what were you made from'.

From what materials, how did you come into existance.

What was the fundamental cause, which could result in such a condition.

His 'eye' can read the structural information, and analyse the cause and effect. The target of his 'eye' was the 'roots' of a human being called Kudou Minoru.

"Please. I will take full responsibility."

"I understand."

No one could take that kind of responsibility. Tatsuya knew this, and nodded.

Fujibayashi herself should have known about that. She promised to take the responsibility of something she couldn’t bear. Tatsuya didn't understand why she would go that far. However, if it was only to see the current state of Minoru, there was no demerit for him. He had also been troubling Fujibayashi with a lot of things, so he planned to go along with her request at least that much.

He directed his 'eyes' to the sleeping Minoru. Since he was sleeping from the medicines effect, he shouldn't be able to resist the 'sight' which was directed at him. As Tatsuya thought, access to the Psion body of Minoru proceeded smoothly.

"Onii-sama."

Not even a single second had passed, when he was pulled back to reality by Miyuki's voice. Tatsuya was covered with sweat.

"I'm ok, don't worry."

After he said so, a smile bloomed on his sister’s face.

Miyuki immediately showed a relieved expression, and headed to the bathroom with brisk steps.

She came back with a wet towel in her hand.

"I'll do it myself."

"No, Onii-sama. Please let me do it for you."

Without further argument, Tatsuya allowed Miyuki to wipe the sweat from his face.

"Tatsuya-kun… How was it?"

Fujibayashi asked him, after he finished wiping the sweat on his face.

Tatsuya figured out in that instance what the Fujibayashi, no, the Kudou Family had made a great deal of to create. He was able to see the roots of Minoru, and had gotten to know the secret of his birth.

However, even with an entire explanation, Tatsuya would only answer of what she asked.

"As you've said. I believe Minoru is healthy, his fragility is due to the abundance of his magic power. His body cannot tolerate the strong Psion pressure within him."

"In other words, his magic is simply too strong is that what’s affecting his body?"

"The Psion body is the container of Psion’s within the human body. The pressure concept is similar to the concept of gas pressure, where the amount of Psion’s and the usage capacity are determined. In Minoru's case, his Psion’s move about too violently even for a magician to handle."

"The pressure of the Psion’s… Is damaging the Psion body?"

"Although it's a little hard to imagine, the Psion body consists of thin pipes with countless branches and turns, in the same shape as the human body. The pressure within these pipes is too overwhelming that it breaks parts of the pipes, which in turn give a feedback that damages the body."

Fujibayashi was about to scream. However, Tatsuya continued his words.

"I don't know if I should say that this is a fortunate one, the pipe of his Psion body was torn due to the Psion pressure. His Psion's have been very active and it actually is actively repairing the tear. The tear and the repair of the Psion body happens in a short cycle. I think that is the main cause of Minoru's weak constitution."

"It would not remain broken, right…?"

"I think, he has more power to repair those than the average magicians."

Fujibayashi showed an expression of relief on her face. However, her beauty was to be soon clouded in sorrow.

"But, I wonder what can we do?"

"The most direct way is to limit Psion activity, but it also means that will cause shackles to be put upon him as a magician. His family wouldn't want him to lower his magic capabilities. Then, the only choice is to strengthen his Psion body."

"How?"

"I don't know that much."

Fujibayashi hid her facial expression with a bow. She might not want to show the conflict that happened on the surface. If you think about Minoru first, to limit his magic power is the first solution. However, magic is Minoru's foothold, him being a good magician is a part of his identity.

Tatsuya did not think that Minoru would be happy to live in a healthy body at the price of his magic. Yet, it must have been hard for his family more than himself, to see him spending a quarter of his time in a hospital bed.

"…Thank you. It should be sufficient enough information. I'll try to consult with the experts later."

Fujibayashi said so with a bow.

Minoru woke up approximately 30 minutes later. By that time, Fujibayashi had regained full reign of her emotions. She worked hard in order not to show Minoru her horrible face.

"Minoru-kun, how do you feel?"

"I'm sorry for the inconvenience."

Minoru deeply bowed in response of his question. No, he was about to do so.

Before Tatsuya interrupted with his hand, and straightened Minoru to see his eyes.

"There is no need to lower your head. Even if you didn't neglect your health, your body has a weak constitution, right? It's not your fault. You can't take responsibility and lower your head for something you have no control over."

Tatsuya's voice was strong. But more soothing than comforting, with a chiding tone. He was scolding Minoru with 'you’ve felt too much guilt', and encouraged Minoru after.

"Sorry, no, thank you."

Minoru agreed with Tatsuya.

Tatsuya did not say anything this time.

"Then, Tatsuya-kun."

Fujibayashi asked him, 'can we hear about your case in the police that we dismissed earlier', before re-enacting 'welcome back~ Tatsuya-kun, Miyuki. Huh? Lieutenant Fujibayashi-san?"

"Lieutenant Fujibayashi? Ah, Tatsuya reached here first."

"We're back, Tatsuya. Well, Lieutenant Fujibayashi-san, long time no see."

Mikihiko's group who went to the Thesis Competition venue had come back. They were uniformly surprised that Fujibayashi had shown up.

"Today, I'm not here for a military mission. You can stop calling me lieutenant and call me Fujibayashi."

Fujibayashi smiled to see their surprise with an 'adult smile'. Erika was of the same sex, and Leo didn't really care about it. The only one person left, reacted like a normal youth. It might be very fortunate that Mizuki was not around.

Erika was sitting on the opposite side of the futon where Minoru slept. As compared to Miyuki who sat elegantly, Erika's siting pose was straight and neat, they had different flavours, but their figures were similar.

"Minoru-kun, how are you doing?"

"I-I'm alright now. Sorry to make you worry."

Erika was certainly a beauty, however, Minoru's face was objectively better. Yet everyone would be agitated at those friendly smiles that were cuter than his appropriate age. One thing, Erika spoke in a friendly manner, he had no experience with an overly-familiar girl in his surroundings.

"I see."

Seems like Erika also noticed the TPO, she did not make a joke out of Minoru's reaction.

Tatsuya repositioned himself to the center of the room. Miyuki followed her brother. Fujibayashi moved beside Minoru, Minami moved to Miyuki's side instead. Erika sat in front of Tatsuya, while Leo and Mikihiko sat down. Hence, everyone was seated in a circle.

"Let's exchange information from today's results."

"I'll start first."

Mikihiko agreed to start first.

"Even so, there is almost nothing to say. We didn't find any locations likely to be a hideout at all. There wasn't any feedback from the Shikigami either. Moreover, there are many police officers making rounds since yesterday. With that, even there is a threat of foreign spies, I doubt it will grow as big as last year."

"Thanks for touting your body, the safety of the Thesis Competition is assured."

"Touting my body, well, you can put it that way too."

Mikihiko's face did not falter, but Erika was pitching at Leo with their regular gig, 'that's your role', 'what did you say!', so nobody cared about them and left them alone.

"In other words, we have succeeded in searching for the foreign spies that targeted the Thesis Competition, since there were none."

"Yesterday's capture was enough of an achievement right. The police seemed to enter their hideout, we can leave the rest to the authorities. Originally, the investigation work is also a part of police work."

"Onii-sama, you don't have to say that so blatantly[32]."

At Miyuki's rebuttal, Tatsuya continued his report.

"We were attacked at the foot of Mt. Ogura."

"The foot of Mt. Ogura, isn't that in the Arashiyama district at Kameyama Park?"

Tatsuya nodded as an affirmation to Minoru, before continuing with his explanation.

"There were 13 assailants. 12 from the Buddhist sect, and one exiled Houjutsu user who was controlling them. All of them are in police custody."

"It's an obvious result with Tatsuya-kun, Miyuki and the heir of the Ichijou Family in the battle. They wouldn't win even with 10 times the numbers."

"They weren't that easy."

Tatsuya smiled wryly and suddenly remembered the earlier question.

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[32] Miyuki was saying ‘mi mo futa mo arimasen’ which literaly: no body and no cover, meaning: too blatant

"Mikihiko, the attackers wielded a double-edge sword with snakes, or dragon fire wrapped around it. Do you know what kind of magic it was?"

Although he threw in a sudden question, Mikihiko reacted immediately. Still he only answered 10 seconds later.

"…That should be the 'Kurikara-ken'."

"The sword from Acala's[33] possession?"

"Yes, it is a magic that borrows its power from the sword of Acala. The symbol of power that can annihilate 'magic'. When it faces Modern Magic, the sword will activate the Eidos and become a kind of counter-magic to destroy the overwritten Magic Sequence."

"Hee… To have such magic, Ancient Magic is quite powerful too, huh."

Mikihiko frowned at Erika, which was in response with 'Poro'. He felt her words were looking down on Ancient Magic. However, Erika wasn't insensitive enough not to realize that she was rude, even if she wanted to rephrase her words, it was too late.

"I'm amazed that they have magicians that can operate such a high level magic. Kurikara-ken is very difficult to maintain in nature, since the magicians themselves would be disabled in order to maintain the magic."

"What will happen if you force others to use it?"

"That's kind of impossible. The origin of magic activation is in the hands of the magician, it consist of a Kurikara-ken spell that can't be touched by others. The blade will automatically disable any magic that comes into contact with the flame, so there is a need to hold it with a little gap in the magician's hand. There isn't a magician capable of doing such a thing… Though, it's another story altogether if he forced others to wield it."

"After forcing them to use it, what would happen to the person?"

"Their hands would burn."

"Eehh!?"

Erika shouted out loud. Miyuki knitted her eyebrows down uncomfortably.

"Despite being formed with a magic, Kurikara-ken's flame is real. Given that fact, it's only natural if your hands burn after you wield it right? There was even a rumour that the sword was purposely thrown at the enemy to use, in order to burn their hands, however, that was not the Sword of Wisdom that was the Sword of Evil."

Tatsuya and Miyuki stared at each other secretly. They decided not to tell them the full story with that eye contact.

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[33] Fudoumyouou: Acala

"I see, that was quite masterful."

"You're really something, Tatsuya, to be able to beat that kind of opponent unscathed."

"Thanks to Miyuki and Ichijou. Then, about what we'll do next."

"Eh? Aren't we going to check out the hotel today and return to Tokyo?"

As Erika said, they originally planned to check out in the evening and go back to Tokyo.

"Yes, you guys can go back to Tokyo first. I'm staying for another night. Tomorrow, I'm going to the police station in order to listen to the testimony of the captured assailants."

"I'm same with Onii-sama."

"Miyuki."

Tatsuya interrupted Miyuki's words in the middle.

"You're the student council president. It's not good for you to take a leave of absence for two days in a row."

Tatsuya was far more important to Miyuki than school, however, since she was ordered with a firm tone, she did not rebel.

"I understand."

"Then, I'll stay here! You always need an intermediary with the police."

"Erika, don't look for an excuse to skip the school."

"Skip school!? How could you!"

Tatsuya turned away from Erika to Mikihiko.

"Regardless to say, it's best for the Public Morals Committee Chief not to skip two days in a row either."

"If it’s ok with Tatsuya."

"I must investigate something else a little bit more."

Mikihiko and Leo knew Tatsuya's 'stance'. Erika had figured out the details. Once he said this, they could only back down.

Miyuki and the others went to the station and Tatsuya returned to the hotel. It took quite some time to put Miyuki on the train, but somehow he managed to get her on a train to Tokyo. He was prepared to cancel his plan when he saw her with tearful eyes while saying 'Onii-sama, please take care' in his right hand's embrace, it seemed like he was thinking too much.

Minoru was supposed to go back home with Fujibayashi since his condition was stable. Minoru himself seemed to want to help with the investigation tomorrow, however he had his own share of absences. He agreed to return home after Fujibayashi, whom he regards as an older sister, had rebuked him strongly.

Fortunately, the hotel still had other empty rooms. Tatsuya moved to a single western-style room from a Japanese-style room, since it was too big for a single occupant. Soon after, Tatsuya met Mayumi at lounge.

"Tatsuya-kun, is it ok for you to skip school? Though I'm not qualified to say such a thing either."

"No, I have decided myself to first investigate further."

"Is that connected to… that work?"

There were other people in the lounge. She couldn't afford to expand the sound barrier field in a place such as this. Mayumi rephrased her words due to this circumstance.

"Yes, so you need not be worried, Senpai."

"Honestly, I appreciate that. I already feel that I've troubled you so much today."

Tatsuya changed the subject after shaking his head.

"Anyway, about tomorrow, Senpai, can you wait for me here again?"

"Here… do you mean at the hotel!?"

When Tatsuya nodded, Mayumi visibly repaired her mood.

"Was I really a hindrance? Well, I may not have been really useful today."

"No such thing."

Tatsuya shook his head and laughed.

"I have high regards for Senpai's ability."

Tatsuya said so while looking straight at Mayumi's eyes.

Mayumi diverted her eyes while blushing.

"Then when did you ask me to stay behind?"

"It's not because of the danger."

Mayumi probably thought that he would answer 'because it's dangerous'. She looked back at Tatsuya with an 'Eh?' expression.

"The situation was not so obvious today, but tomorrow will be a little rougher. I do not want to show such things to a girl. Especially a lady like Senpai."

Mayumi diverted her eyes from Tatsuya yet again.

"It's alright. Despite my looks, I'm used to this kind of thing."

Certainly, she even won over the 'man-eating tiger' in the battle field of Yokohama. She might be able to take the roughness, but the conversation had gone in an awkward direction.

"Even so, I don't want to let you see such things."

Tatsuya pressed again, unwilling to give up. Mayumi still looked away, and began to put her hands together and massaged her hands with her fingers.

"If that's the case, then I can't do anything."

By the time she said those words, she had completely turned away, Mayumi's body was trembling lightly even without her noticing it.

"…That was close."

Mayumi returned her gaze to Tatsuya. Her eyes were narrowed with hints of suspicion.

"I was about to get caught in your hand."

Tatsuya opened his hands, and shook his head lamely at Mayumi who was glaring at him.

"I was not deceiving you. I truly don't want a lady to see such a scene."

"Onee-san will not be fooled."

Mayumi still glared at Tatsuya. Tatsuya chose not to care about it.

He had no memory that he was ever trying to trick Mayumi, yet, apparently Mayumi had a strange belief.

It was unmistakably his true feelings, when he said that he didn't want to show a lady such a scene.

However, he couldn't afford to be glared at forever.

"…Very well. In exchange, please don't faint at anything you see, ok?"

Tatsuya succumbed and Mayumi laughed happily for some reason.

"I'm fine. Despite how I look, I'm still an adult."

Unreliable, Tatsuya thought so, but of course he wouldn't purposely say such thing from his mouth.

"Ah, thank goodness. You arrived safely."

"Miyuki was quite anxious since Onii-sama was not around."

"It's ok, I’m always looking after you. My 'eye' has never left you."

"That's right. I'm sorry."

"It's not something to apologize over. I'm the one who was supposed to say so because of this sudden change, I'll be surely back by tomorrow, so please be sure to lock the door and rest tonight."

"Dear, Onii-sama, I'm too old to be treated like a child."

"No matter how old you are, you will still be my sister.”

"…I think that's what a father says to his daughter though."

"You don't want our father to say that to you right?"

"That's right. Then, I'll do as Onii-sama said, I will lock up carefully and rest well tonight. Onii-sama, good night."

"It's a little early, but, good night, Miyuki."

Soon after he finished calling Miyuki, the room door where Tatsuya was staying was knocked on. He went to the front door, and turned on the installed monitor. Mayumi was reflected in the screen."

"What happened? At this hour…"

Tatsuya opened the door, and Mayumi asked so. Even though it was still 8 P.M., it wasn’t the time for a young women to be visiting a man who wasn’t her lover.

At the very least, that was what Tatsuya thought, though apparently Mayumi had a different stance.

"Tatsuya-kun, you haven't had your meal right? Why don't we eat together?"

Certainly, Tatsuya had not had his meal, but he could easily do so in a public dining room. Although he had no intention to dine at the luxurious restaurant within the hotel.

"At the restaurant?"

"Yes, I reserved seats at the front desk just now, since he told me there were free seats. It's French cuisine."

Apparently, she had decided that he would escort her.

He had to be careful not to show a sullen expression.

"I understand. Could you wait at the lobby while I change?"

"It’s fine as it is."

"I won't go if you insist on that."

Although Mayumi's dress was not so formal as a cocktail dress, the A-line black one piece with lace on top could be seen as glamorous attire. Moreover, she wore appropriate shoes and accessories to complement the dress, it was not an appearance you could afford to be wearing for daily activities.

Tatsuya closed the door with a strained smile.

"Wah! Tatsuya-kun, it suits you well."

"Not as much as you."

Tatsuya's words were based on the fact rather than humility. What he was wearing was a suit and tie that was prepared for emergency cases, to meet the minimum standard of the dress code.

"Then, let's sit down."

This restaurant had not been as formal as what Tatsuya expected. There was no waiter, only a waitress who guided them.

"Here you go."

Tatsuya pulled a chair out for Mayumi.

"Oh dear, thank you."

Mayumi sat in the chair and smiled over her shoulder.

Tatsuya sat on the opposite side, Mayumi opened her menu book to choose her course. It was a rare type, having been printed on paper.

"Tatsuya-kun, what will you have?"

"Let's see. I will go with this course."

"I see~. I think the À la carte is also good, but since this is my first time, it's safer to go by this course."

After their exchanges, the both of them ordered the same course for two.

There were no noteworthy events during the meal.

Since they weren’t sure if they were being spied on. They couldn't talk about the incident.

When suddenly Mayumi complained 'it's inconvenient not to be able to use the sound barrier field', Tatsuya focused his eyes.

He found out that within the past two days. The people of Kyoto were unfriendly to magicians. Since the Magic Association HQ was placed here, Tatsuya thought, the locals would at least be neutral, however it was the exact opposite.

——Did something happen between the Association and the locals.

He ended up thinking about such thing. That was the reason he hid his CAD in his sleeve slightly above his wrist. Tatsuya thought that he should avoid acting like a magician here.

However Mayumi did not wear her CAD. He could only wonder about the reason, whether to avoid the hostility of the people in the surroundings, or simply because it didn't fit in with the style she wore today.

The eventful night started while he was enjoying a dessert with coffee. Mayumi saw this and asked him to accompany her to the bar.

"I don't need to say this after all this time, but I'm still a high school student."

"Well, nobody here thinks that you're a high school student. Since you aren’t wearing your uniform, you don't look like one."

Mayumi's remark was without harmful intention. Nevertheless, Tatsuya received a slight shock.

Perhaps, due to that shock, Tatsuya was successfully forced to the front of the bar.

Once they got in, Mayumi closed the distance between her mouth and Tatsuya's ear.

"’Senpai' is prohibited here, so can you call me Mayumi?"

"…Why?"

Tatsuya replied a single tempo later. Even if he didn't show it, he was quite disturbed by Mayumi's pace.

"If you call me Senpai, they'd know that we're Senpai-kouhai from school right? I'll call you 'Tatsuya-san' too" He wondered if Mayumi wanted to do role-playing.

"It would be troublesome if they think you're a student."

With that reason, Mayumi pulled Tatsuya by the arm to the bar. It was a small size, counter-only shop.

There were only a pair of customer in the back who were a couple.

The bartender only glanced at the two who just came in, and continued to steer (lightly stir the cocktail that he was making).

Mayumi sat at the other side of the counter, followed by Tatsuya next to her.

"Master, can I get an Alexander. Tatsuya-san, what do you want?"

"One Summer Delight"

The well-toned bartender fixed his eyes at Tatsuya. He nodded soon after without saying anything, and took out a large cup in his hand.

After some observation, not only was his skin well-toned, his body was well-built and firm. Even though his behaviour was crisp, he made an impression that he had received some specialized combat training in the past. What did he do in the past... Tatsuya couldn't help but wonder.

"Why did you order a non-alcoholic beverage?"

Yet, Mayumi was intrigued by Tatsuya's order. The content of Summer Delight was lime juice syrup and carbonated water. It was indeed a non-alcoholic cocktail as she had said.

"Please forgive me, Mayumi Ojou-sama"

"Huh?"

"I must not dampen my response in the case of an emergency as your escort."

"Huh? Huh?"

Mayumi probably looking forward to enjoying being a pretend lover. However, as expected, it was contrary to Tatsuya's principles.

The bartender waved the shaker tenderly and poured out a brown- chestnut colored liquid into a transparent glass, before serving the beverage to Mayumi.

He spoke to Tatsuya instead of Mayumi.

"Customer, are you a bodyguard? You are young, yet you look considerably strong."

"I'm only an apprentice."

"You are very humble."

The bartender took out a new shaker, he poured in lime juice and red Grenadine syrup. After fully pouring the mixture into the glass, he added a small amount of sugar syrup.

With a nimble movement. He poured in the carbonated water into the glass and served the beverage to Tatsuya.

"Customer, with all due respect."

The bartender said so before asking Tatsuya.

The couple sitting at the other end of the counter were in their own world, and weren’t listening to their conversation.

"Customers, are you not magicians?"

Tatsuya didn’t show a surprised face.

"If you can figure that out, Master, you too are a magician right?"

The couple left their seat. The bartender sent the two a polite bow.

When the bartender was washing the dishes, he continued the conversation.

"It's an old story. I lost my power as magician due to an accident during training."

"I see. Pardon my rudeness."

The bartender shook his head in response to Tatsuya's apology.

"As I've said, it's an old story. Furthermore, I'm the one who started this conversation."

In that instance, Mayumi spoke with a stuffy voice.

"Master, give me a second one."

"Ojou-sama, would you slow down your pace a little..."

"I'm fine. Tatsuya-san who doesn't want to drink sake should just stay out of it."

Apparently, she didn't like that Tatsuya kept talking to the bartender. Or perhaps, she didn't like to be the escorted Ojou-sama.

"Pardon my rudeness."

The bartender lowered his head as he interpreted that it was his fault, he returned to washing the dishes while grinning.

However, Tatsuya had no intention in stopping the conversation with him despite the situation.

"Master, I have something that I'd like to ask."

Although the bartender asked him through an eye gesture, 'is it ok to leave her alone', Tatsuya never took Mayumi's mood into account.

"Is there any problem between the Magic Association and the local residents of Kyoto?"

"Why do you ask of such thing?"

"It might be my false impression, but the people in this city don’t seem to have a good impression of magicians."

"Ah, you noticed that the Kyoto locals are not so friendly to magicians."

The bartender wiped his hands with a towel. He began to polish the glasses with his dry hands. Tatsuya observed the process, all of his products were not made by machines, and he thought that it really looked like a stage setting than a bar.

"There wasn't any big trouble in particular. There were stacks of minor misunderstandings. From outsider's point of view, it was a very common thing to say. However, since the other party was a magician, the people in this area had overreacted."

Tatsuya had an unsatisfied face. The bartender handed out a small dish with a single piece of chocolate.

"The lady over there, please help yourself."

"Thank you very much."

Tatsuya received the dish and placed it before Mayumi.

Mayumi grasped the one piece chocolate and put it in her mouth, while turning away, likely in a gesture of a 'hmph'.

Tatsuya smiled wryly at the bartender.

The bartender laughed through both his mouth and eyes, while continuing the conversation.

"It might be fuelled by the existence of the Magic Association HQ’s. The locals might have felt that the magicians had taken over the city."

"Even though they weren’t hijacking it, there were still magicians who lived here who were also residents of Kyoto, but."

"Although you’ve lost your magic, you understand us, but for non-magicians, magicians are a fearful existence. As humans who cannot use magic they wouldn't stand a chance against a magician. Furthermore, they don't know what magicians will do to them, whether to restrict them or to wound them, or worst, to kill them, I understand their anxiety of this."

The bartender cut in when Tatsuya was about to continue.

"There's no room for resisting, even with a gun. However, please consider the other end. For locals who aren’t magicians, magicians are mysterious creatures with an invisible gun. Kyoto residents are not special, such things happens in every other city."

Mayumi left the bar, with a pretty strange step.

(That's why I told her that three cups was too much.)

Tatsuya complained in his heart, yet it was too late. He didn’t know that the alcohol content in that cocktail was more than 20%.

"Senpai, it's your room, please get a hold of yourself."

"Yeah, thanks, Tatsuya-kun."

Mayumi felt like she could fall asleep at any moment. He had delivered her safely to her room, so Tatsuya's mission was supposed to be over, yet.

"Ugh."

After seeing Mayumi sit down and slurp in front of her room door, as expected, even he, couldn't say 'excuse me' and leave her here.

"Senpai, where do you keep your key?"

"Here…"

Mayumi shook the card key in her hand. And for some reason, she was about to put it in her chest, Tatsuya snatched the key immediately.

(…What in the world did she want me to do, this person.)

When he recalled the horror briskly, Tatsuya unlocked the door.

Fortunately, there wasn't any underwear scattered in the room like in a popular fiction setting.

"Saegusa-senpai, please sleep in the bed."

"Yea, I know…"

Tatsuya learnt one thing. Mayumi was the type to regress into an infant when she was drunk. Seems like he was surrounded by these type of people. It might still be better than crying and hugging, but it didn't change the fact that it was time-consuming to take care of.

Mayumi walked to her bed, Tatsuya supported her, since she was staggering.

Tatsuya led Mayumi to the bed side that way.

"Senpai, you've reached the bed. It's better to take off your clothes, lest your precious dress be crumpled"

"What do you want?"

"Help me undress."

Hearing the expected answer, Tatsuya's head began to earnestly ache.

◊ ◊ ◊

Monday, October 22nd. Tatsuya went to Mt. Arashi, Sagano again. It was the place where he was attacked by the traditionalists the day before.

Mayumi was sleeping in the hotel due to feeling sick. Needless to say, it’s a hangover. Tatsuya thought that this is the only positive effect of last night's incident.

There were no signs of the police. At the very least, there was no one investigating yesterday's incident. Seems like the detective who hated the 10MC had no willingness to do a decent investigation on yesterday's review. Or perhaps, another emergency had arose. Either way, it was advantageous for Tatsuya not to pay any concern for being in the eyes of the police.

Tatsuya stood at the gate, he recalled the information that he had gotten yesterday. It was similar to a state of hibernation since he wasn't hurt yesterday, and there hadn't been a release of Psion waves to get in his way, the possibility of fainting due to recalling this information had been kept to a minimum, he opened the data of 'where they had come from'. The coordinates of the traditionalists' groups' hideout.

It would be unnecessarily conspicuous of him to stand still in the middle of the bamboo forest. Hence, Tatsuya went down the road while collating the map from his memory and the data from the information terminal.

The destination was easily found.

It was a mundanely big house. No, if it was this big, it probably couldn't be categorized as mundane.

At first glance, the rural atmosphere still existed, it was a building similar to those used as meeting places in towns and villages.

Tatsuya secretly scanned the building with Elemental Sight from the outside. It seemed that there hadn't been any hidden traps inside. Tatsuya went through the gate without hesitation.

Even after he entered the site, he didn't feel any sign of magic. However, it was not something that he could confirm just from scanning the outside.

He put his hand on the sliding door. Of course, it was locked. It was a double key, electronic and physical. Unfortunately for Tatsuya, he couldn't obtain either of them. He didn't have such a handy magic. Therefore, he decided to open the door by magic that he had on his hand.

The lock on the door was broken apart.

Tatsuya opened the door without hesitation and proceeded inside, the same way as when he passed through the gate. A wheel shaped weapon flew in soon after. The blade had a circular ring with eight spokes extending radially form the center. It was a Buddhist magic tool called Hourin[34], which seemed to be used as a projectile weapon.

When Tatsuya dodged the Hourin, it stopped in the air before it went out to break through the door in the reverse direction. The Hourin came flying in from another direction, it carried out the same movement. After some observation, there was an extended thin thread of Psion's to guide the Hourin.

"Yoyo, huh?"

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[34] Hourin: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharmachakra

The movement was very similar to a yoyo. The rest was simple. Tatsuya dodged, now, the four Hourin, and broke down the yarn of Psion's.

The Hourin flew towards the door and broke through to outside.

There was agitation spilling out from the other side of the wall. Tatsuya decomposed the four threads, and closed the distance between him and the magician who was hiding in the optical camouflage in a single jump.

The transparent figure was shimmering, and was gripping a blade-like weapon in both hands. This was a magic tool of the Buddhist sect called Dokumeikine[35]. It was a reformed weapon, the same as the earlier 'Hourin yoyo'.

The Magic Sequence projected off from both ends of Doukumeiki was for lightning magic. It was projected, but had not completely overwritten the Eidos. Disregarding the magic that was about to be activated, Tatsuya used Flash Cast on his palm and slammed it at the opened chest of the shadow.

Due to the virtual waves that made vibrations inside solids, and also by active Aerial Mines. The tissues within the body vibrated violently from the point of contact with Tatsuya's palm. The vibrations spread to the upper body along with the fluids, and the man collapsed. The optical camouflage he used was solved, he had a similar appearance to yesterday's assailants.

Tatsuya ducked his body, while the invisible man approached him from behind——he had clarified that it was optical camouflage instead of transparent body tissues——hastened the steps. Rather than welcoming the opponent's large swing of his feet like Chinese Martial Arts, Tatsuya raised his foot to hook the opponent's foot.

The invisible man was wavering. His figure was flickering, there was a visual of a man's back.

He used his palm with vibration magic to strike him down. The second assailant laid on the floor.

"Even I know how the transparent spell works. Stop wasting my time and show up."

After Tatsuya's provocation, men within a wide range of ages came out from the shadows. There were 10 of them. Fortunately, there weren't any women. It wasn't as if Tatsuya would go easy on woman, but the aftertaste would be quite difficult to forget[36].

"Why, the Marishiten[37] way doesn't work on him…"

It's because your magic is inexperienced, though Tatsuya didn't say this. Their skill level was low, Tatsuya was sure that it was the cause. If Yakumo used the same spell, even Tatsuya would have difficulty to finding his whereabouts.

"Bind and curse him!"

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[35] kinda hard to explain, here goes the pics (http://m.intl.taobao.com/list/B6C0B9C9E8C6.html)

[36] yariniku: remembering a difficult thing after you do it (you won't forget)

[37] Marishiten: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marici_%28Buddhism%29

One of the men shouted out the instruction. He didn't appear to be the oldest, but Tatsuya felt the strongest magic came from him. Tatsuya set that man who seemed to be the leader as a target.

Tatsuya stepped forward daringly to the center area. There wasn’t any furniture or obstructions in the room, just like a Kendo dojo. 'So it was not a meeting place, but a dojo', Tatsuya suddenly thought of that out of nowhere.

The 10 magicians surrounded Tatsuya at regular intervals.

A regular decagon. Overlapping a pentagon with a 36° interval, or a staggered five-pointed star.

Tatsuya jumped, while five of the magicians threw a strap each from their hands.

Not towards Tatsuya, but towards each other diagonally.

After they threw the straps, they received another end of the strap from another person.

The five-pointed star made of a strap with five different colors was pitched.

Tatsuya observed it from above.

Most probably, the five-pointed stars was some sort of magic that pinches the target in the middle by multiplying pressure from five different directions.

However, Tatsuya had no plan to just stand in the center until they completed their magic.

The moment the straps were thrown, he flew directly above it.

Before he reached the ceiling, he kicked the air and headed to one of the vertices of the five-pointed star.

It was a move that was hardly used in a match. Yet, that scene caused the other party to be amazed, it was a peculiar war-specific skill.

He created a foothold for his foot, and accelerated through kicking the panel, he punched the magician's face with the total force of his body weight plus the acquired speed.

The magician fell down. The after effect momentum was usually worrisome, but Tatsuya didn't have time to worry about such things.

The five-pointed star formation collapsed. However, this was not the end of their effort.

Tatsuya graced a knee kick at the magician next to him before he landed on the floor.

The magic was only activated when he wanted to make a foothold. It was only possible since he made it with Flash Cast that had a fast activation speed.

The Buddhist sect of traditionalists who had gathered here had by no means weak psyches. Despite their emphasis on asceticism, they were first-class combatants. However, that was only in decent fights. They couldn't keep up with Tatsuya's acrobatic movements.

By the time they were able to respond to the surprise attack, only five of them remained.

Six eyes gazed upon him, while the other two magicians were behind him. One of the magicians behind him had activated a lightning magic.

Modern Magic couldn’t generate electrical currents directly at the subject.

However, Ancient Magic talent could emit the shock from the magician towards a specific location.

This difference usually didn’t matter so much, as the speed of lightning is 100,000 km/s. It was an impossible attack to dodge even for someone who noticed the lightning was coming.

Just before the lightning was fired, Tatsuya jumped sideways to interrupt the attack.

The magician who casted the lightning had lost sight of Tatsuya. However, it was too late to abort the magic. The lightning struck out from the Doukumeiki Blade and collided with his fellow's attack.

Due to this fact, those magicians were hesitating to use another magic.

The gap that was created, provided a sufficient time for Tatsuya.

By reflecting a force field, he could obtain a speed equal to self-accelerating magic by supporting his frame, Tatsuya knocked out the remaining traditionalists.

This traditionalist magician who served as the base's leader, awoke due to severe pain piercing his body.

He couldn't think well amidst the pain.

However, he couldn't stay unconsciousness due to the pain.

"Are you conscious now? If you understand my words, nod. I'll loosen the pain a little."

The pain lightened, and the man's consciousness steeped in, he shook his head hard.

As promised, the pain would be reduced a little.

His line of sight was hazy due to the severe pain, he regained a little clearer profile.

A young man.

The man had shaded his own face, to hide it.

The leader was trying to join his hands to form a magic.

At that instance, severe pain struck his consciousness.

"Don't do any unnecessary things. You only need to answer my questions."

The leader nodded hard, when the voice told him to obey.

The pain lowered again.

This time, to even allow him to think, yet his hazy sight was still intact.

"Zhou Gongjin was here right? The foreign magician who fled from Chinatown in Yokohama."

The leader didn’t have any reason to lie, he nodded honestly.

"That man was here until Friday, the 12th. Am I right?"

The 12th, 12th… the leader was thinking hard as his head still wasn’t working well. Then, he recalled that Zhou Gongjin was there until Friday, he shook his head vertically over and over.

"Where did Zhou Gongjin go?"

A new wave of pain struck him. Strangely, he could think clearer.

His eyes were still hazy and his limbs couldn't even lift a finger, yet his mouth could speak freely.

"He said he wanted to go to Uji. He said that there was a good hiding place nearby the tomb… I don't know if it was the truth or a lie…. I don't know."

"Your men have been used as a puppets by the Houjutsu users from the continent, did you give your consent to this?"

"I'm not… their teacher… I don't have any… position to instruct them."

"You are the leader right?"

"They were comrades… we're equals… we don't receive any orders from among us…"

"I understand. Good work."

Immediately, the greatest amount of severe pain passed through the leader's mind. His consciousness had broken, falling apart.

Tatsuya sent a mail to Fujibayashi, regarding the place of these unconscious traditionalist magicians. Finally, he asked her to pick up the traditionalists, he wondered if it was an unnecessary note. Even without the note, Fujibayashi would have arranged to collect them.

Tatsuya could weigh the credibility of the information that he elicited from the leader of this base. It was hard to believe the story that there hadn’t existed anything like a chain of command in such a group. He didn't think it was possible to conduct a collective battle in conjunction only to a share a sense of purpose.

However, the information of the hiding place of Zhou Gongjin was consistent with the information Tatsuya obtained from the shaman at Kiyomizu Temple. He decided to believe this fact as both Buddhist monks and the shaman couldn’t have possibly given him the same information just to mislead him, he didn't plan to doubt them that much. There wasn’t a need for a clear division line for conjectures.

Tatsuya decided to report to Hayama that Zhou’s hideout was likely to be around the tomb at Uji, as he needed to go back home today.

After finishing his work, he was greeted with ashamed, diverted eyes at the hotel. She didn’t say 'terrible' or 'it's different from your promise' from her mouth, but she was blushing from her cheeks up to her eyes.

He had an idea of the cause of her embarrassment.

Last night, Tatsuya had received an unreasonable request from a young lady (Mayumi) to strip her from her dress. He stripped her quickly before it became troublesome, and shoved her into her bed with just her underwear. He went out of the room without a seconds glance at her.

Even Tatsuya thought that she had been quite wild last night. However, he also had his share. It was good enough that she wasn't (sexually) assaulted in that situation.――Of course, he didn't say such a thing out loud.

"By-by the way."

Up to here Mayumi who had been quite confident to stand beside him, suddenly entangled her tongue.

"Umm, that, I have something to say to Tatsuya-kun."

Tatsuya thought from his heart, 'I decline' or something along that line, while remaining silent. He could guess the topic while observing Mayumi's attitude.

"I…"

Despite knowing that they were alone in the room, Mayumi looked restlessly to her left and right, as if she was afraid to be heard, she closed the distance between his lips and Tatsuya's face.

"Why… did I sleep with only my underwear?"

Because you said you wanted to strip… But this was not the right way to say it, Tatsuya couldn't find a way to to say this phrase.

"Didn't you do that yourself? No matter how drunk you were, you should have enough discernment as to not remain in your dress while you go to bed right?"

Tatsuya took a step from Mayumi's lips which almost touched him, and answered so innocently.

"I wonder if a drunken human could think that much?”

"Who knows? Since we're talking about Senpai here, you should understand yourself better than me right?"

"Tatsuya-kun, I."

The perimeter of Mayumi's eyes reddened with shame, she faced Tatsuya for the first time since he was back.

"I can't hold my liquor much, but I'm the type who remembers everything."

Tatsuya wanted to flee that place at that very moment. Unfortunately for him, he understood that he couldn't do that in such situation as a man.

"…Though I feel that you didn't have to be that rough."

Certainly, he did shove Mayumi into the bed roughly.

However, could he be blamed because of that? He questioned himself when he recalled. Yet, to say 'you're the one who wanted to strip to your underwear' would be a king-cobra-grade boomerang.

Mayumi was still looking at Tatsuya shyly.

In this very awkward atmosphere, it was a mental labour intense mission to send Mayumi back to the nearest station in order to go home, while Tatsuya waited at the end.

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The moment Tatsuya opened the house’s gate, the front door opened.

"Onii-sama, welcome back."

The one who greeted Tatsuya back was Miyuki, as usual.

"I'm home. Sorry for this time."

Miyuki couldn’t hide the color of relief of worry from her face. Logically, it was impossible for Tatsuya to get hurt, but her worries were of a different aspect. Tatsuya said 'sorry' since he understood his 'crime'.

"No. As long as Onii-sama is safe, Miyuki is satisfied enough."

Miyuki shook her head at his apology.

Tatsuya immediately went into the house, and proceeded to the living room after taking off his shoes. His travel bag was taken by Minami, while he was sitting with Miyuki on the sofa.

There was no meaning in resisting. Rather than giving the service, he was probably receiving the service. He let his sister do as she liked quietly.

Miyuki sat beside Tatsuya joyfully while Tatsuya lifted the coffee cup. However, he suddenly put down the cup and the calmness disappeared. She repeatedly shifted her eyes from and to Tatsuya's face.

"It's alright. I have progressed well on the request of Oba-ue. At this stage, it should even satisfy even Oba-ue herself."

Miyuki must have wanted to hear about today's progress. Since he thought of that, Tatsuya gave her a rundown of today's events.

"No, It's because of Onii-sama after all."

However, it seemed like Miyuki had wanted to ask something different.

"Say it. What do you want to ask?"

Tatsuya encouraged[38] her to speak, Miyuki seemed to hesitate for a while and finally shook her hesitation and asked her brother.

"Onii-sama, what causes Minoru-kun's weak constitution?"

In response to this unexpected surprise, Tatsuya failed to answer immediately.

"…As I said yesterday. Minoru's magical power is too strong for his body to contain it."

Miyuki's face was cloudy, while furrowing her eyebrows anxiously.

"That's his current situation right? Onii-sama, have you seen the cause?"

"Why are you interested in such a thing?"

"Your state from that time wasn't something Onii-sama would usually have had. I just wondered what had made you do so."

It was Tatsuya's blunder for being speechless. It was the same as confessing that 'there was something'.

"Onii-sama, please. If you have anything that you are worried about, please let Miyuki hear it. I want you to share your worries with me."

Miyuki worked very hard to stare at Tatsuya. He appreciated his sister's effort to lighten his heart from the depth of his heart.

"It's better for you not to know."

However, he was hesitating to tell Miyuki about the secret that he had gotten. ——By the way, Tatsuya didn't feel anything wrong about violating Minoru and the Kudou Family's privacy.

"Please. I don't want Onii-sama to suffer alone."

However, since Miyuki solicited a haunting teary look, Tatsuya could no longer keep the secret hidden.

"I understand. This is a pretty shocking story, so you have to hear it with strong heart."

Miyuki breathed in relief. To see that his sister was calm, Tatsuya proceeded to tell the secret.

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[38] mizuwomukeru, literally: directs the water, meaning: to encourage other party to speak something that you're willing to entertain.

"Minoru and Fujibayashi-san are half-siblings."

Miyuki failed to show any reaction for a while.

She must have digested her brother's words when she covered her mouth with both of her hands.

"But! Fujibayashi-san's mother is Minoru-kun's father's real sister."

"Minoru was an experimental body. Probably through artificial insemination. Strictly speaking, it was not incest, but he is still a child born of two real siblings.

Miyuki’s shocked face was intensified. It took her a considerable amount of time to regain her ability to speak.

"Then… Minoru-kun's constitution, was the harmful effect of incest?"

Tatsuya shook his head. However, he did not indicate a definite denial.

"I can't make any conclusion. The problem lies in the imbalance of the Psion body, which affects his physical body. It might be from the cause of mis-adjustments throughout the process."

Tatsuya sighed before continuing his words.

"However, it might be due to the close relationship between the genes being undeniable. Even during the research of magic, researchers have refrained themselves from using genes from parent and child or between siblings. There are still a lot of aspects of a Psion body, and also the spirit being affected, to be discovered."

The color had bereted from Miyuki's face.

She received a big shock, as if it were her own doing.

Chapter 9

Saturday, October 27th. Finally the day before the Thesis Competition, the support team, First High representatives and the security team all went to Kyoto in the afternoon. First High was the sixth school to present, actually the competition started at 1:40 P.M., so they should have been able to arrive in time even if they departed the morning of the day itself. However, it had been the custom of First High to go one day earlier whenever the competition was held in Kyoto.

They rented a large bus and a truck dedicated to carry the demonstration equipment for the presentation to a dedicated terminal. The Car train (a high-speed train which mounts a large passenger vehicle and enormous luggage) was opposite the station in Kyoto's suburbs, thence, they would go to the Kyoto hotel.

CR hotel was one of the high standard luxury hotels for high school students to stay in, but it was difficult to change the mindset of people when there was some degree of fixation. Nobody dare to move to a lower grade hotel, since it had been their tradition since long ago.

"We've arrived~!"

The first one to get off from the bus was Kanon, who enjoyed the bus trip with much excitement. Last year, her expectation to travel by bus along with Isori during the 9SC was shattered, that was the reason she looked forward to this trip. Although she should have gotten her revenge during the last 9SC this year, but it seemed like the result was not as expected as she still recalled last year's 9SC disgruntledness.

The last person to get off the bus was Izumi. Actually, Miyuki as the student council president was supposed to check the attendance and left behind items, but Izumi said "there such chores" and volunteered to do it for Miyuki.

Instead, Miyuki checked into the hotel as a representative from First High. The keys were then distributed by Tatsuya and Honoka.

Thus all First High students scattered to their assigned room.

The First High students stayed at a cheaper type room than the Japanese-styled room. It was a twin Western-style room. Tatsuya shared his room with Mikihiko. It was certainly not a coincidence, but a deliberate choice.

"Mikihiko, I'll leave the rest to you."

"Leave it to me. It's a pity not being able to accompany you."

"I can't depend on you that far, there is also information disclosure issues. Moreover…"

"What's wrong, Tatsuya?"

Waiting for Tatsuya to say something, Mikihiko tilted his head.

"…No, I have something that I want for you to ask everyone in school. I don't think that anything will happen, but it's better not to neglect the warning."

“Yeah, I understand.”

The thing that Tatsuya failed to voice out was “Isn’t Mizuki here too?”. The art club had been greatly participating in the making of the current demonstration instrument and were selected to support the members by preference. Mizuki was included among the selected members. Tatsuya was wondering if Mikihiko was concerned about her.

In the end, Tatsuya did not say that. He judged that it was not his business. Tatsuya thought that it wasn’t something that should come out from an outsider’s mouth.

“I might be late. I’ll contact you if I can’t come back tonight.”

“Got it. Be careful, Tatsuya.”

Tatsuya hid his favorite gun-shaped CAD, Silver horn, before responding to Mikihiko by raising his hand, while walking out of the room.

◊ ◊ ◊

Tatsuya headed to a hotel, one smaller than the CR hotel where First High students stayed, but inconspicuous. It was a hotel that was frequently used by the Kuroba Family for work purposes.

“Good afternoon, Tatsuya-niisan.”

“Tatsuya-san, we have been expecting you.”

Fumiya and Ayako were waiting for him in the lobby.

“I’m sorry for asking you to come all the way here.”

“No, the case was originally brought to us after all.”

“We can’t keep talking while standing up like this, Tatsuya-san, why don’t you sit?”

Ayako welcomed Tatsuya to the sofa. After Tatsuya was seated, Ayako sat at the opposite end of the table, while Fumiya brought in some drinks.

He was wondering if it was allowed to bring food or drink here, before he noticed a 3H wiping another table. No, it was a business type ‘Humanoid Servant’, it was similar to the type found in the aircraft which was called ‘Servanoid’. Since Tatsuya determined that it was not a problem, he received the drink without refrain.

Ayako expanded the sound barrier. There was no warning against unauthorized use of magic. It seemed like this hotel was not only at the level of Kuroba family’s work, like what he had been told, but also completely modified for the work of the Kuroba——no, the Yotsuba.

“This will do, and. Tatsuya-san, here are the things that you’ve requested.”

"The bike is the same model with the one that Tatsuya-san has been using. It is parked in the parking lot."

"The clothing is stab proof and also bulletproof, do you want to change into it?"

"Boots, gloves, helmet and all of the combat requirements are fulfilled."

"How gracious…"

They had put in much more effort than he had expected, Tatsuya was about to laugh. Of course, he didn't actually laugh, since he knew what the two of them think about him seriously.

"Thank you. I'll use them well."

Hearing this response, Fumiya and Ayako showed a really happy smiles.

"Then, we will guide you to your room."

Ayako put down her tea cup and rose. Fumiya stood and left the drinks at the table, hence Tatsuya followed him.

The change in clothes that were prepared really fit into Tatsuya's body, that it felt creepy. Tatsuya wanted to ask where did they get his measurement from, but in the end he decided that it's best not to ask, so he stopped himself from asking.

"How far have you narrowed it down to?"

Tatsuya asked about the hiding place of Zhou Gongjin.

Hayama had been sharing the information that he got on Monday to the Kuroba Family. Based on that information, the Kuroba's had been investigating around the hideouts of Zhou Gongjin this week.

"We are almost certain of this."

"I see, as expected of the Kuroba. Then?"

At Tatsuya's question, Fumiya showed a slight hesitation.

"That, it's hard to believe, but"

"JSDF, Uji Second Supply Base. There is almost no other place to shelter him in this area."

In place of Fumiya who couldn't speak about this so lightly, Ayako answered him.

Tatsuya failed to say, 'no way'.

"I see. It is indeed quite a hideout."

After he wore a blazing look, Tatsuya move to take the communication console.

"Fumiya."

"Yes."

After being called with a hard appalling voice, Fumiya answered with a louder than necessary voice.

This voice was evidently showing that Tatsuya's feelings had reached a critical level. Since Tatsuya was not able to have a high level of strong emotions, the moment it reached a certain stage, he would show it as an non-emotional intention on the surface.

The treachery of the National Defense Forces, was way over his tolerable limit. Since rebels had shot Miyuki in Okinawa, he was especially intolerant against betrayers.

There was a phrase called 'nukeba tamachiru mizu no ha[39]'. It was a representation to say that a Japanese sword would shine coldly, eerie like when it was sharpened. Tatsuya who lost his feelings in anger, was reminiscent of this phrase.

"Is it possible to do external communication?"

"Please wait for a second."

Fumiya outstretched his hand beside Tatsuya, and keyed in the security code in the keyboard.

Tatsuya was prompted by Fumiya, he sat down in front of the console.

Tatsuya entered the complex code. He waited for about 5 seconds before a female officer appeared on the monitor.

"Tatsuya-kun, what's suddenly wrong?"

Tatsuya entered the code for emergency calls that are assigned to Fujibayashi's own line.

"Lieutenant, I'm in Kyoto now."

"I see…"

With only those words, Fujibayashi seemed to understand him.

"Did you find out?"

She intentionally omitting words in her question, Fujibayashi sighed in the midst of resignation.

"I have an idea of Zhou Gongjin's hideout."

Tatsuya hadn't only shared the information from the traditionalists at Kiyomizu Temple and Mt. Arashi to Hayama only, he also shared it to Fujibayashi. It was a serious crime for this country's army to assist Zhou Gongjin who led the foreign troops in this land. Tatsuya could not afford to avert his eyes even if he's asked to. Tatsuya was going to use that.

"Where is it?"

Fujibayashi showed a painful expression in response to Tatsuya's straightforward question.

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[39] Usually heard in the narration of activities in a sword play (as in stage play)

“The military police are scheduled to be dispatched. Special Lieutenant Oogura must not interfere.”

“This is not subjected to the military rule of secrecy. Fujibayashi-san, where is Zhou Gongjin? You’re part of the Kudou Family who promised me cooperation, please answer me.”

“…He’s inside the JSDF, Uji Second Supply Base. Tatsuya-kun, leave the rest to the Armed Forces. Even if it is you, you won’t be left unexcused if you trespass on the base.”

“I understood. See you.”

“Tatsuya-kun!?”

Without clearly saying what he ‘understood’, Tatsuya cut off communications. Additionally, he locked the line via the console.

He looked back, behind him Fumiya and Ayako had seen his exchange with Fujibayashi with rounded eyes.

“Support is cut off. How about the plan?”

“It starts at sunset, and then we get into the base.”

Fumiya who just regained his sense answered Tatsuya.

“How about the intrusion path?”

“We’ll enter proudly from multiple gates. It is not a big problem to overcome such a plain fence.”

“Of course, we have to have someone to standby by the gate.”

“We don’t have the numbers…”

Tatsuya stood up while glaring.

“Fumiya, Ayako, I will get someone to help us. I might not be able to enter the base on time, but I will do so if the time allows me to.”

“Understood. Tatsuya-niisan, the communication device will not be connected at that time.”

“Tatsuya-san, be careful.”

“Fumiya and Ayako, you too, don’t let your guard down.”

“Yes.”

“Of course.”

After hearing their replies, Tatsuya proceeded to the bike that had been parked at the parking lot.

He immediately recognized the bike. However, he rode the bike in a different direction than what was shown by the arrow.

The sky in the west had started to turn the color red. Not much time until the start of the operation. Tatsuya called Ichijou Masaki while riding the bike, he used the radio interface from information terminal that was charged in the helmet.

“Shiba? Do you have something?”

For Masaki, a phone call from Tatsuya seemed to be a surprise. On the other hand, Tatsuya might show a similar reaction if he received a phone call from Masaki. Since he knew that himself, Tatsuya did not say anything unnecessary.

“Ichijou, I narrowed down Zhou Gongjin’s hiding place.”

“Really!?”

“Yes, where are you now?”

“Nearby Kamigamo Shrine.”

As Tatsuya thought, he came. Third High usually arrived the day of the Thesis Competition itself, not a day before. However, Masaki should have come earlier for a preliminary inspection when he considered last week’s situation.

“Let’s meet up at the southwest entrance of Uji Park at 5:00 P.M.”

“5:00 P.M.? Understood. I will be there.”

Masaki probably thought that there was no more time. However he understood immediately the meaning of the specified time. Despite the unfriendliness of their communication, he still immediately took action.

He would be a formidable adversary, but a reliable ally. He understood well that Masaki was a good man, which was why Tatsuya preferred to contact him.

(I should hurry up myself.)

It would be awkward if Masaki managed to get there on time while he’s late. Tatsuya increased the speed of the bike.

◊ ◊ ◊

At the JSDF, Uji Second Supply Base, Zhou Gongjin who had been pursued by Tatsuya’s group was preparing to leave the base.

“Zhou-sensei, do you really need to leave?”

The man who was barely over 30, said so with a disappointed voice.

“Captain Hatae, I also have no plan to leave, but it seems like this place has been found out.”

“I see. How regrettable. If you stay here longer, I could shield you even from the 10MC, I won’t let any of them touch even a finger on you.”

Captain Hatae was not only an advocate for integration with the GAA, but also committed to Ancient Magic from the continent, and was one of the individuals that adherently believe that Japan was ‘a history of upstarts from less than 100 years ago’. He fervently believed and claimed that Zhou Gongjin ‘was not involved in the Yokohama Incident’, he had been harboring Zhou for a week due to his sense of justice as a retaliation to modern magicians until the Kuroba had tracked him privately.

“We have no choice. Their side is backed up by his excellency Kudou after all.”

Zhou laughed thinly. The smile was very becoming of his beautiful face.

Captain Hatae pursed his lips. As Zhou Gongjin said, it was not possible for him to refuse an order from the base commander for an inspection request as he was only a captain. Originally General Kudou Retsu had so much influence that he could step over the regular procedure for inspection in this situation.

“I wanted to listen to more about senjutsu from you…”

“I myself, am still a fledging mage. I am still immature, which is visible in unexpected ways. I still have a ways to go before being able to teach others the arts…”

Zhou used his usual excuse to softly reject Hatae’s request.

Hatae changed the subject without any sign of feeling rejected.

“So, when will you depart?”

“I think during your spare time tonight.”

“Certainly, the inspection is scheduled to take place early tomorrow morning, so that would be for the best…”

“I’m grateful that you could obtain information prior to the inspection notice.”

When Zhou lowered his head saying so, Hatae wore a pretty pathetic looking expression.

“However, the gate will be closed at night.”

“I can take care of that much.”

Watching the confidence show up in the form of a smile, Hatae recalled Zhou’s special magic.

“You’re right. At the very least, I’ll prepare a car for you. It’s from my personal belongings instead of a military vehicle. I think you wouldn’t be followed that way.”

Official cars, not limited to military vehicles, had a tracking device planted for theft prevention. That means, for disguise purposes, it was better to use a private car for sure.

“I thank you for all of your good will.”

Zhou showed his gratitude carefully by lowering his head.

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Tatsuya had been leaning against the bike that he borrowed from Fumiya when he noticed a red bike approaching him after 15 minutes of waiting.

(This guy really likes red.)

Somehow, he was heart fully dazzled. Since the emblem of Third High was a red colored star, it probably sparked some love for his school. Tatsuya wondered if Masaki was aware of this.

“I’ve made you wait.”

Masaki got off from his bike and took off his helmet while greeting Tatsuya.

“No, you’re quite early from the specified time. We still have enough time to form a strategy.”

The current time was 4:50 P.M. The sunset would be at 5:10 P.M., so they still had some margin of time.

“Then, what kind of setup is it?”

At the very least, he had to explain the strategy that he had prepared beforehand to Masaki.

“Zhou Gongjin’s hideout seems to be over there.”

Tatsuya pointed in a southern direction while saying so.

The immediate place that he was pointing was the JSDF base.

Masaki did not immediately catch Tatsuya’s intention. However, after a few seconds, he understood the meaning of ‘over there’, and widened his eyes.

“No way, are you saying that he’s inside the JSDF’s base!?”

“JSDF Uji Second Supply Base. There is a high possibility that Zhou Gongjin is hiding inside.”

“…Are you sure?”

“It’s a possibility, and we’re about to confirm it.”

“Into the base!?”

Masaki wore the face of ‘is this guy serious’ or ‘is this guy insane’.

However, Tatsuya was experienced in the matter of the forces inside and of the JSDF. Hence, he did not flinch at this late hour to enter the JSDF blockade area.

“The arrest of Zhou Gongjin has been mobilized in secret by a certain magician group.”

“Apart from the military police, is it?”

“Yes. It is not a formal operation.”

Masaki perfectly understood that he was suggesting of an illegal operation.

“Soon they will be entering the gates of the base.”

“From the gate? ...I see so they are using Outer-Systematic Magic?”

Tatsuya nodded at Masaki’s question.

Masaki guessed the identity of the ‘magicians who were mobilized in secret’.

Magicians who specialized in Outer-Systematic Magic, magicians who might go against the JSDF. Masaki only had one idea of where it was heading to.

“Shiba, you are…”

“I’m different from them.”

Before the question formed, Tatsuya denied him flatly.

“It’s about time. I will be entering the base by jumping over the fence. Ichijou, what are you going to do?”

Masaki did not answer immediately. Trespassing into JSDF base was an obvious criminal act. He still had a law-abiding spirit which couldn’t be conveniently shut off like Tatsuya’s.

His parents would place the priority of the 10MC over that of their morals as citizens. His father, especially, might even skip pushing his back and go straight to kicking his ass if he saw Masaki hesitating like this.

The problem was his position as the production team of Third High. If he gets caught in police matters right before the Thesis Competition, moreover causing a serious incident isn’t just a misdemeanor, the competition might be affected. The shock given to the students of Third High, regardless of being an upperclassmen, classmates, or juniors, would be big. More than anything, he was afraid to let his best friend’s effort to go to waste.

(――But, I’m of the 10MC.)

Masaki was lost in his thoughts for a few seconds.

“…I will go. In the first place, I was deceived by that man last year. I couldn’t just act indifferently.”

Tatsuya glanced at his information terminal, before gripping his bikes handle.

“The operation starts in 5 minutes. Let’s go, Ichijou.”

“Understood.”

Both of them put on their helmets at the same time and began to ride their bikes.

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At that time, at the east side of the Uji Bridge just outside of the infamous Byoudou-in Temple, a car stopped.

"Thank you. I'll call you once I'm done, so you can wait at the usual place?"

The one who got out from the car and talked to the driver was no doubt, a beautiful boy.

The passerby who happened to be at the scene stared at him as if his soul had been pulled out of his body. With the background being that of the ending of the day, Minoru's ethereal beauty drifted through the time of this world.

A middle-aged man followed Minoru from behind. There wasn't any need to say that he was Minoru's escort, as he was visibly trained, despite not having a large build.

"Minoru-sama, should we wait here?"

"Yes."

It was a clearly different tone than the one he used for Tatsuya and friends, he seemed accustomed to ordering people.

"Zhou Gongjin may flee through here to escape from the siege. When the time comes, I must detain him here at any cost."

"However, there is another bridge in Uji River towards Oshima."

Rather than doubting Minoru's words, the timid bodyguard asked him a question. It was not as if he was acting miserly, however it was futile of him to hide being afraid of something. If Zhou Gongjin chose a different route, Minoru's efforts to push his still unhealthy body would be wasted.

"That side is a private flyover right? His escape route would be limited once he got on to that flyover. He needs to be able to move freely in all directions in order to exert the true power of Qi Men Dun Jia. Zhou Gongjin will not use that route."

"However, that means there is a possibility that he will flee in the eastern direction…"

"There's Mt. Takamine at the east side. As seen from his escaping pattern, Zhou Gongjin prefers the city more than mountainous terrain. I guess it relates to his Ghostwalker skill."

"But."

"Noisy."

The bodyguard who was still trying to express his concerns, was blocked by Minoru's hand.

"Are you trying to say that my reasoning is flawed?"

The bodyguard fell silent. He was not meant to refrain someone from his employer's family. However, the clear and cold air that was drifting out of Minoru's body had sealed the mouth of the bodyguard.

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"It's time. Start the operation."

"Yes! As you wish, young master."

After answering so, the man turned his head while still wearing his black spectacles, making a nimble cracking sound.

"You idiot, its young lady! Young master's disguise is."

"Shut up!"

The quarreling between the black glasses' men was blocked by Fumiya who had turned into 'Yami'.

"It's not the time for twiddling! Start the operation!"

"Yes!"

The men in black glasses lowered their heads and with one knee down, and dissolved in to thin air like a mirage all at once.

"For goodness sake… to think that they're Kuroba's genjutsu[40] users…"

Fumiya lamented while holding his temple, when Ayako came out, dressed as 'Yoru' and approached him from behind and spoke a word of comfort.

"Yami-chan, there's nothing to do but to use them right. Competency and personality are two different things. Rather than having good but incompetent subordinates, competent ones with bad personalities are favorable right?"

"Well, that's right, but…"

"More importantly Yami-chan, it has started."

The flashing alarm was resounding within the base. His subordinates were not supposed to make such a blunder. There were a lot of flaws in their personality, but their abilities were acknowledged even by Fumiya.

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[40] Genjutsu: illusion

“I wonder if it’s Tatsuya-niisan.”

“Yes, he must have been thinking of becoming a decoy. I wonder if he intends to evict the prey from the northern side to the south.”

“Tatsuya-niisan, why is he doing such a dangerous things.”

“Tatsuya-san has his confidence. No matter how he is threatened by compromising situations, he is still be able to walk out safely. That’s why he shouldered the most dangerous role.”

“…I see”

“We must not waste Tatsuya-san’s good will, let’s not keep standing around. We must confirm the whereabouts of Zhou Gongjin soon.”

“I got it”

Behind Fumiya, there was a small passenger car, which was painted dark-blue had refrained. It was not a normal car, for sure. Its body strength was equal to that of tanks, it was a custom-made robotic car with an engine which was comparable to a race cars.

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The alarm rang in the JSDF Uji Second Supply Base. Additionally, one or two shots could be heard.

“What’s happening!”

Captain Hatae yelled from outside of the room. The subordinates heading outside answered the question with pale faces.

“Intruders in the base! There are two of them! Both of them are probably magicians!”

“What!?”

Hatae’s surprise could not be said as exaggerating. Magicians are powerful adversaries, even if he’s alone. A magician’s power can’t be generalized due to the difference in capacity between individuals, but it was said to be comparable to the strength of a single squadron of forces. If he is a powerful magician, his power could be that of a battalions scale force by himself.

There were two of them. Rather than infiltrating the base secretly, they were boldly showing resistance, supposedly there was no way that they were below average.

“How’s the situation!?”

“The intruders are coming towards us while destroying the supply goods. They can’t be stopped even after were to fight back!”

Even with the alerts, Zhou Gongjin continued to pack without raising his face, after he made a snap sound, everything became quite.

“Just in time.”

“Huh? Zhou-sensei, what…”

“It’s a good opportunity. Everyone, please eliminate the intruders. Utilize the full strength of this base.”

As soon as Zhou said so, Hatae and his men were trembling as if they were electrocuted.

It hadn’t happened exclusively in that room. The same thing occurred to the squadron under Hatae’s command.

“Captain-san, as your gracious words, I will borrow your car. Hand over the key.”

Hatae handed over his car key to Zhou in an awkward fashion.

“Then, what should you be doing now. If you do not eliminate the intruders who entered the base, the military wouldn’t be able to maintain its pride. You must thoroughly eradicate them without even leaving a piece of their corpse.”

“Yes. This is a challenge to the pride of JSDF. Don’t underestimate them. Crush them.”

“Yes.”

The tone of his voice was contrary to the content.

At the neck of Hatae and his subordinates, who saluted and left the room, the mark of spider bite could be seen.

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The two intruders entered the base with a full-face helmet for bikes on their heads. Just in case, Tatsuya had decomposed the surveillance cameras after a thorough search.

Of course, he didn’t only destroy the surveillance cameras that were hard to see.

“What’s that magic!?”

“It’s not the time to ask that.”

Tatsuya brusquely dismissed Masaki’s question. They were careful not to call each other’s name in front of the enemy, the conversation between the two had become increasingly not amiable.

“I’ve never heard about such magic!”

Masaki cried out so, it probably couldn't be helped. It was his first time to see Tatsuya's 'decomposition'.

Against Tatsuya's CAD, weapons and weaponry was broken down and scattered on the ground in pieces. The guns were taken apart. For vehicles, first the wheel would come off, then the door, until everything was gradually loosened and scattered around.

"More importantly, the fuel vaporization is really slow."

"This is time consuming!"

Masaki was vaporizing the hydrogen absorbing liquid in the fuel and separated the hydrogen gases by convergent magic, as to prevent ignition from the leaked fuel. The hydrogen gas was collected and tailored into a hydrogen balloon within a spherical fire which prevented it from escaping into the sky. The difficulty of the magic itself was much more complex than the 'decomposition' magic that Tatsuya using doing.

"So explosions aren't your only talent."

"I know!"

Masaki followed Tatsuya's instruction despite some complaining, he understood that this technique might be useful in the future for him. Magic vaporized the fuel as to avoid ignition by converging and isolating the hydrogen before releasing it into the sky. This would help him to neutralize weaponries on the battle field without unnecessary casualties. It could even be a more useful technique than 'Rupture'.

The two of them broke down the weaponry randomly, the shower of bullets at them had suddenly intensified. The bullets had changed from the powerless rubber bullets to live ammunition.

Masaki expanded his barrier. The partial part that couldn't be covered by him, was secretly tackled with decomposition magic by Tatsuya. The two of them separated, while jumping behind the shield.

"They're shooting!"

"Live ammunition. Apparently they seem to be manipulated. Just like the traditionalists."

Masaki's face was colored by understanding.

Last Sunday, he was attacked by magicians, who ultimately committed suicide, at Mt. Arashi. They had been manipulated by the houjutsu users from the continent who had been hiding behind the bushes.

A roar came from the building. Tanks appeared one after another. It was not only a single vehicle, but a line of four of them.

"Hey, they've even taken out the tanks!"

“They don’t learn. They intend to bring it to a higher level, huh.”

They were small vehicles for urban warfare, but it was excessive to be used against two individuals on foot. However, depending on the situation, they were still insufficient forces against two magicians.

In this case, it was the latter.

“I’ll go at once. Don’t let it ignite.”

“Don’t ask for… the unreasonable, leave it to me.”

Masaki was trying to say, don’t ask for the impossible, was cut off as he did not perceive that such whining was something to be done at this situation.

The wheels fell off at the same time. The barrels fell and guns displaced. Armor plates peeled of all at once. This all happened at the same time to the four tanks.

Fuel leaked from the engines.

It ascended to the sky and vaporized prior to ignition, as it mixed and diffused in the atmosphere.

“Good work.”

“It doesn’t make me happy to be complemented by you.”

Towards Masaki’s cold attitude, Tatsuya smirked wickedly.

“Should I ask Miyuki to complement you?”

“Do-don’t joke around! It’s not the time for that!”

Masaki was upset about an interesting thing.

“At any rate, let’s go! Zhou Gongjin is escaping… It’s him!”

“What?”

Tatsuya extended his ‘eye’ towards the direction of Masaki’s sight.

Tatsuya didn’t ask if Masaki was certain.

Masaki had seen Zhou Gongjin in close proximity face to face. There was no way he could be mistaken about any information that he got during that situation.

Zhou Gongjin was heading to the south gate, riding a gunmetal colored sedan. He chose to pass through the passage where the surveillance devices were not recording, he must be planning to get out of the base.

(This…?)

Within the perimeter of Eidos, the foreign matter was mixed into Tatsuya senses. It didn’t belong to Zhou, it was something he unintendedly devoured.

(A stung of the bee, huh… I won't let your death wasted.)

Tatsuya made a convenient oath for the sake of the deceased that he only met once.

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"Zhou Gongjin is approaching the south gate."

"I wonder if the other gates had been guarded by the people of the base. As expected of a magician who has beaten us, the Kuroba's and escaped."

At Fumiya's words, Ayako responded with a tone of irony and admiration.

"Otherwise, we'll be troubled."

Fumiya sat in the rear seat of the autonomous car, while Ayako sat next to him.

At the same time, a gunmetal sedan with Zhou Gongjin in it had appeared out of the south gate.

"Chase him!"

"Yes, young master. No, young lady."

"Anything will do! Start quickly!"

Even the autonomous car was not allowed to speed up if there was no emergency driver outside the area of traffic control. The previously elected leader of the black glasses operation team who was yelled at, was chosen as the driver to chase Zhou Gongjin.

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(What is this obnoxious feeling...)

While driving the car to the south, Zhou Gongjin gradually felt a sense of being tied up that he had never felt before.

Strictly saying from the result, he was successfully evading the enemy with a narrow gap. He acknowledged that Kuroba's——Yotsuba's chasing team was obstinate, but in the end, he managed to get away from them. He was living peacefully for the last 10 years in Chinatown, but he was previously being hunted constantly for about 30 years, and kept living in hiding.

(Oops… I'm still only 24 years old now.)

At least, that was stated in his identification. He bought his restaurant in Chinatown four years ago, and he remembered that he wrote ’20 years old’ on the documents that were submitted at the time.

(Years are but like a name for us, it is just another label.)

Perhaps, he was too absorbed reminiscing in the thought that he failed to recognize that there was a shadow of a human blocking his way, before the anti-crashing device was activated.

Zhou attempting to ring the horn, he wore an expression unbefitting of his character.

He saw the boy’s face.

He was an otherworldly beauty.

Zhou himself had a beautiful face, but this boy was on another level altogether.

However, he recognized the beautiful boy.

He remembered seeing the boy before.

”Kudou Minoru! Why are you here!?”

He was one of the very few magicians that Zhou kept in mind to be wary of.

He learnt the extent of Minoru’s capability during his attack in Nara.

Zhou disabled the anti-crashing device in the car forcefully.

Minoru raised his right hand to aim at the car.

A flame started within the car.

Zhou jumped out of the vehicle before the engine was ignited.

Zhou Gongjin felt a chill running down his back. He didn’t feel this way when he faced Kuroba Mitsugu or Nakura Saburou.

Kudou Minoru did not hesitate even a second when he blew up the car.

He didn’t only aim at the target without any hesitation, he was also not afraid to drag in any bystanders within the vicinity.

There were no bystanders. There hadn’t been a car that had passed by either. However, he could see that the boy had never really cared about the surrounding.

His ethereal beauty matched up very well with his ruthlessness, it made Minoru looks mysterious in the eyes of normal beings.

Zhou took out his artifact and aimed at Minoru. It was not kasei-tai, but genjuu. Zhou realized that he had to use his strongest technique in order to go against Minoru.

A black one horned beast materialized, it ran towards Minoru at a high speed that couldn’t be tracked by the eyes.

It was not a speed that humans could react to.

Minoru couldn’t deflect the attack, the black beast pierced through Minoru——and soon after Minoru’s body slipped through it.

“Disguise!”

Zhou Gongjin recognized the magic. It was ’Parade’ the trump magic of the Kudou Family. The magic did not only hide Minoru’s actual position, but also altered the position information in Eidos.

Zhou decided to flee. He realized that he couldn’t break through ’Parade’. He understood that after seeing Minoru’s technique once.

Minoru aimed his right hand at Zhou.

However, the lightning he initiated landed one meter away to the right of Zhou’s position.

Minoru shook his head childishly. The expression that he had was not humanly, it was more like angelic. Like an exact image of an angel who smiled mercilessly.

Lightning struck down at Zhou Gongjin’s surrounding.

Minoru did not miss. Zhou used Ghostwalker to influence Minoru’s aim.

However, the one feeling the horror was Zhou. He was planning to shift Minoru’s aim by 90°. However, Minoru was always able to spot his position and his aim was only shifted by 30°.

Zhou called all the remaining beasts from his artifact.

At the same time, he took out a black handkerchief, and spread it in front of his eyes.

All the beasts were simply slipping through Minoru’s figure.

The black handkerchief fell down on the ground.

Minoru kept an eye on the downstream of Uji River, while smiling without malice.

His eyes were looking directly at the Eidos, he caught ——the ‘shadow’, ‘yin’——of Zhou who fled, and did not lost sight of his position.

Zhou was running at a speed of 40 to 50 km/h along the Stream of Uji River. It was a popular technique of Suikoden[41] called ‘Shinkouhou’.

He was running back in the direction of the base, but he was planning to go down to the lower side of the bridge in the middle and going over to the opposite shore.

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[41] Suikoden (http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%B0%B4%E6%BB%B8%E4%BC%9D) or (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_Margin)

However, an adversary showed up in front of him all a sudden. She didn't jump from the side of the road, instead, she materialized from thin air.

"Mock Teleportation!?"

He knew the technique when he acquired a parasite who was able to do this. However, it was in a much lower level than hers, her technique allowed her to appear without any premature sign.

A girl in a bob-hair-style shoved a fist with a knuckle duster while fluttering the hem of her skirt.

The distance was too wide.

Yet, Zhou suffered a blow enough to make his right leg fumble down.

Zhou spread out a white handkerchief.

It was large enough to hide him when opened.

Behind the shade, Zhou pierced his own acupuncture point to numb the pain in his right leg. The severe pain continued, but he affirmed himself that it was just an illusion.

He took out his last artifact which he had kept as a spare from his chest.

When visibility of the blockade fell, the bob-haired girl had disappeared.

In exchange, there was a familiar boy with a red CAD in his hand standing in front of him.

"Ichijou Masaki!"

"Long time no see, Zhou Gongjin. You deceived me well last time."

Zhou tried to jump down from the Uji Bridge.

However, in that instant, the water from the river blew up causing water to splatter.

"Jumping into water in the face of the Ichijou Family's `Rupture' is the same as charging in to a mountain of bombs."

After hearing that voice from his back, Zhou Gongjin turned around.

"Shiba Tatsuya…"

Zhou activated Ghostwalker at his best. He tried to get away by slipping through Tatsuya's side.

However, in front of his eyes, Tatsuya formed a hand chop. Zhou Gongjin knew the sharpness of the Demon Blade that could even shear through steel, he was forced to step back.

Zhou was sandwiched between Tatsuya and Masaki for the second time.

"Why does my Ghostwalker not work on you!"

Zhou was still smiling in this kind of situation.

Was it a façade?

Masaki didn’t comprehend his real intention.

Tatsuya didn’t really care about his real intention.

“Ghostwalker, what an amazing technique. I heard it may not work in close proximity, but yours can work just fine. I didn’t know that you’re going to slip through by my side.”

”…I don’t understand. Then, why did you prepare to attack just now?”

A smile bloomed in Tatsuya’s lips.

That smile was at the same essence as Zhou’s, albeit not as beautiful.

There was no feeling in it, a façade smile.

”I didn’t know your position. However, I knew the position of Nakura Saburou’s blood that resides within you.”

Zhou opened his eyes widely in surprise.

For the first time, Masaki felt like he was seeing the true face of the ageless Taoist magician.

“Nakura Saburo’s blood… from that time?”

“Did you get pierced by needles of blood? Usually foreign elements would disappear from the body within two weeks. Seems like it contains quite a strong desire.”

“Desire, was it? I thought that concept had been tossed away by Modern Magic.”

“No matter how you reason, the things that exist, exists. Likewise with the opposite.”

“There are things which exist, yet do not materialize.”

Tatsuya raised his silver CAD at Zhou.

”You can continue your lecture in jail. Though they might not give you much time.”

”Either way I would be killed right.”

“I’m not the one who can decide that.”

”In other words, asking to spare my life is useless?”

Tatsuya did not return any further answers.

“As long as Nakura Saburou’s blood is within you, you cannot escape from me.”

This was Tatsuya’s ultimatum.

“So, this is it…”

Zhou sighed, accepting his fate.

At the next instant, he was jumping towards Masaki.

Shinkouhou had no connection with leg muscles. Even if the legs were numb, so long as the magician had them, it could be activated.

Masaki did not know about that.

However, he did not expect this kind of case. It was probably a good coincidence, that he was prepared.

At the moment Zhou Gongjin jumped at him, Masaki pulled the trigger of his red CAD.

In no time, his magic ‘Rupture’ was activated.

He improved his technique by vaporizing the blood from the body parts instead of the whole body.

Both of Zhou Gongjin’s legs burst from within.

Shinkouhou was canceled, while Zhou lied on the ground.

“This is it.”

Masaki still ready with his CAD, encouraged him to surrender.

Zhou Gongjin got up immediately. His pride did not allow him to lie pathetically.

”Certainly, this is the end.”

Zhou stood up slowly, even though the parts from his knees downward were not supposed to be able to move.

It was a ghostly movement.

”However, you cannot catch me.”

Zhou masked his face with a smile.

It was a mask-like smile.

“I shall not perish. Even if I die, my existence shall prevail!”

“Ichijou, back off!”

Tatsuya leaped backward at the same time as he shouted.

Ichijou also took a distance away from Zhou Gongjin.

The next moment, Zhou’s whole body was spouting blood, red blood, which turned into red flames.

“Hahahahahahahahaha...”

An endless laugh followed the burning flame. It lasted until the fire died out.

After the flame disappeared, there wasn’t any trace of bone.

“Has Zhou Gongjin really died?

Masaki was dazzled and stunned, the sunset turned into night, and the stars had begun to shine.

“There was no trace of him escaping somewhere else. He had undoubtedly died in that fire.”

Tatsuya didn’t face Masaki. His eyes were looking at the direction of Uji River.

Masaki had somewhat the same feeling, he answered Tatsuya, ’I see’.

Masaki didn’t ask him, how he knew that.

”With this, the case of the Yokohama Incident has ended?”

“Yes.”

”I see... It was dangerous.”

“What was?”

Tatsuya asked back at Masaki.

Since Masaki didn’t say anything else, even Tatsuya couldn’t understand it.

Masaki faced Tatsuya.

”The JSDF was manipulated, they even took out tanks. It could have triggered insurrection.”

”They had already used flashy magic. They were already in the stage of insurrection.”

Masaki laughed at Tatsuya’s serious answer.

”Then, should we say to ourselves ’good job’ since we’ve managed to bring the situation under control before expansion of the insurrection?”

”You can see it from that point of view.”

Tatsuya also laughed aloud.

The laughter of the two, was dissolved by the lonely autumn wind.

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“Tatsuya-niisan, thanks for your hard work.”

When he returned the bike to the hotel, Fumiya and Ayako had arrived before him.

”Fumiya and Ayako too, thanks for your hard work. I was able to stop his movements thanks to your stunning combination.”

The two of them looked away in embarrassment when Tatsuya praised them.

“By the way, Tatsuya-san, how did you figure out that man’s position? We lost sight of him despite chasing him with a car.”

Ayako was indeed embarrassed, she didn’t look at Tatsuya’s eyes when asking this question.

”Thanks to a certain magician’s obstinacy, who cornered him even after death...”

“?”

Ayako made a confused face. Fumiya stopped looking downward, tilting his head curiously.

”I still don’t know how that had happened. I will tell you more, once I figure it out.”

Tatsuya entered the room next to the one that the both of them used.

He left his clothes there when he first came to the hotel.

Tatsuya left the door open while he changed, Tatsuya spoke to Fumiya.

“Fumiya, why don’t you report to Hayama that the mission has been completed. I still need to settle a lot of things from now on.”

”I understand. Please leave that much to me.”

After having finished changing his clothes, Tatsuya came out.

”I’m counting on you.”

He said so as an exchange for saying farewell, Tatsuya left the hotel soon after.

Chapter 10

The next day, Sunday, October 28th.

It was finally the day of the 2096 Thesis Competition.

Tatsuya didn’t participate in the Nine Schools security as one of the joint guard, but only came as a supporter, so that he could move relatively freely.

During the lunch break, Tatsuya met Mayumi with Miyuki who was freed from her judge seat in the Thesis Competition.

“I see… So the culprit who murdered Nakura-san has committed suicide.”

“Well, it was the result of us cornering him, so I don’t know if you can say that it was suicide.”

Tatsuya told Mayumi that the case of the murder of Nakura had been resolved.

“That’s good. Since Tatsuya-kun has helped me to settle Nakura-san’s grudge.”

Tatsuya received a heartfelt smile from Mayumi.

“Thank you, Tatsuya-kun. I will forget about what happened that night.”

“Senpai, that.”

“See you. Work hard on the security work. Miyuki-san, good luck in judging.”

She didn’t listen to Tatsuya’s answer, Mayumi stood up from her seat and disappeared into the crowd.

“Onii-sama.”

In the tea room, Tatsuya remained with a bomb that had been thrown onto his hand, Miyuki forcefully smirked while staring at Tatsuya.

“What did she mean by that night?”

“No, about that.”

“And? Please tell me if it doesn’t trouble you… Or perhaps.”

Miyuki put her hand on top of Tatsuya’s while asking this question.

“Is there any harm in me knowing about it?”

Miyuki’s hand was cold, yet it felt soft. Her hand had restrained Tatsuya in that place.

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"——This way, there isn't any need to position a sensitive alloy plate at the 'engraved' part in order to activate the engraved type magic. 'Engrave' is intended only to induce Psion flow, as we can see right now at the projected image, the same pattern of 'engrave' can be obtained after the Psion's fill in. The essence of engraving magic, as you can see, does not depend on the engraving itself."

After the main presenter finished his words, First High ended the presentation. A round of applause arose from the audience.

"It is the greatest applause until now."

Miyuki had been selected as one of the judges, she described the reaction of the audience in the auditorium next to Tatsuya. They also thought that 'the content was innovative enough'. Both Miyuki and Tatsuya agreed that First High could win this year's Thesis Competition.

"Then, Onii-sama, I'll return to the judge's seat."

"Next is Second High. Huh… who's that?"

"Huh? Isn't that Minoru-kun?"

The venue was filled with buzz. Perhaps, amazed by the beauty of Minoru who stood at the stage in preparation for the presentation. However, Tatsuya was surprised due to another reason.

Soon, there was an announcement from the facilitator.

"This is an announcement to everyone in the venue. There is a change in the presenter from Second High, as the original presenter suddenly fell sick, thus the presenter has been changed."

"….Miyuki, don't you need to go to the judging seat."

"You're right. Then, Onii-sama, excuse me."

Normally, the audience would leave their seats in the time between the announcement and the presentation. The audience who supported the schools also changed. However, this time, none of the audience left their seat.

The presentation from Second High began with a peculiar atmosphere.

"I will start the presentation of Second High. The theme is 'The Principle of Mental Interference Magic and the Theory behind its Activation Sequence."

The buzz within the venue had just risen. Little was known about magic of the Mental Interference System. This is definitely an ambitious and revolutionary topic in magic research."

"——As you can see from this observation, when a person has recognized something, a Psion Information Entity is formed. Then, when this Information Entity is no longer recognized, the information body will break down. It's noted that for a Psion Information Entity, which forms due to recognition, is actively erased by the recognition target. For example, for momentary incineration, the object will start to collapse before the actual disappearance."

“The Theory of Psion’s being a particle that makes an Idea or a thought into a form has been proven by many observations up to the current date. It shows that the passive cognition of human’s is what makes a Psion Information Entity, but it’s actually the active mental process that is what makes the Psion Information Entity.”

“I think, an Idea has to turn into the Psion Information Entity in order to create a reaction in the physical dimension from the mind. If we apply this theory, we can translate and categorize Mental Interference Magic starting from Telepathy to Sensory type “ESP” as a magic that uses a Psion Information Entity.”

“——Therefore, I believe a Psion Information Entity forms through the mind, the mind has characteristics that I have explained. Of course, my theory has not covered every characteristic, but if we can write the elements which are shown in this presentation into an Activation Sequence, we can speed up the formularization of Mental Interference Magic. At the same time, it will lead to magic that can counter or nullify Mental Interference Magic. This will also become an opportunity to remove any mythical fear towards Mental Interference Magic.”

“——In this way, Mental Interference Type Magic is not essentially different from Four Great Systems and Eight Major Types. The mind forms a Psion Information Body within the correlation with reality. Correlatively, a Psion Information Body is formed from the mind. Thus, by building an Activation Sequence that can alter Psion Information Body, we can at least reform the current consciousness. This magic can alter the active consciousness through altering the cognition of a person.”

“If a person’s mind is not divided into consciousness and sub-consciousness, instead has two parts within itself as present part and dormant part, I believe, every Mental Interference Magic can be developed into actual magic skill through observing and analyzing Psion Information Entity.”

Minoru concluded his presentation.

A moment of silence.

The venue was wrapped in a thunderous applause.

The 2096 National Magic High School Thesis Competition crown of victory was won by a freshman from Second High, with Kudou Minoru as an appointed main presenter.

It was the birth of a new star for National Magic University from the First to Ninth Affiliated High Schools.

◊ ◊ ◊

At the same time, in the Yotsuba Main Manor, there was a more serious meeting held than the Thesis Competition.

“As you’ve heard, this time Shiba Tatsuya has faithfully fulfilled the mission despite not having any helping force, and even having successfully fulfilled the request of the client. He is a valuable resource for the Yotsuba and through this mission, I can see that loyalty is not an issue.”

While everyone showed a bitter face, Maya slowly opened her mouth.

“This mission was set as a test for Tatsuya. The result is as reported by Hayama-san. Everyone, don’t you agree?”

“We can only acknowledge him.”

The head of Shiiba family, opened his long sealed mouth.

“His power is certainly valuable.”

The head of Mashiba family also agreed.

“This time he passed, only this time.”

The head of Shibata family did not hide his displeasure while raising his opinion.

“Shouldn’t we drop our strange prejudice?”

The head of Mugura family proposed, “I second that. If we think about it, we have expect too much of him from the beginning, hadn’t we? It’s time to judge him more objectively.” The head of Tsukuba family agreed.

“I think that we’d made a premature decision. Objectively, it is true that Shiba Tatsuya has a disproportionate talent.”

The head of Shizuka family prudently proposed so.

Everyone fixed their eyes to the head of the Kuroba family, Kuroba Mitsugu who had kept silent.

“Kuroba-dono, what do you think?”

The head of Shibata family asked him.

“I have failed the mission this time. I believe I’m not in any position to talk about this matter.”

A heavy silence fell upon the room.

A bland voice, which disregard the silence concluded the discussion.

“Then, let’s postpone the final decision until the New Year Celebration meeting.”

It was the final statement, until the final decision would be made on the New Year.

No branch families could object to the words of the head of Yotsuba Family.

(To be continued in “Yotsuba Succession Arc”)

Afterwards

How did you like ‘Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei’ Volume 15 ‘Ancient City Insurrection Arc (II)’. Although the subtitle ‘Ancient City Insurrection Attempt Arc’ might suit the content better, but the title would been a spoiler for you. That’s why, I ask for your understanding and forgiveness that I didn’t put ‘attempt’ in the subtitle.

Now, we finally see the Yotsuba’s branch families. Although they were only in supporting roles in this installment, for me this is something memorable as ‘...finally these guys can come out’. Well, I can say that they will be in supporting roles in the future as well, since they are an essential part to producing the climax of ‘Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei’, they were always waiting for their turn. The installment where they will make a major appearance will be one of the climaxes of this series.

The appearance of the branch families itself had been decided from the beginning, although their structures and family names were only decided recently. The various NG[42], I was quite troubled by them. Shiiba, Mashiba, Shibata, Kuroba, Mugura, Tsukuba, Shizuka. Among those, Shiiba, Mashiba, Shibata are the easiest to understand. Each of them carry ‘four-leaf’, which is a variation of ‘Yotsuba’.

Maybe you’ve already noticed about Kuroba, it was taken from ‘Yotsuba no Kuroba’ (four-leaf clover).

Mugura was derived from a plant called ‘Yostsubamugura[43]’.

Tsukuba was taken from ‘Tsukubanesou[44]’. Tsukubanesou is a perennial plant of the Lily family with four leaves.

Shizuka was inspired from a plant called ‘Hitorishizuka’. It is also a perennial four leaf.

During the process of choosing their surnames, I had a hard time in attempting to follow the naming law, thank goodness I could find good names.

Lastly, a little background story of the creation for the setting of ‘Zhou Gongjin mixed up with Qi Men Dun Jia’ (in the end I’m going with this setting), in ‘Yokohama Disturbance Arc’ and this ‘Ancient City Insurrection Arc’ came from the ‘The Romance of the Three Kingdoms’ (to be exact, the play which was written by Yoshikawa Eiji-sensei) with some improvisation in the episode where Zhou is coming out. In other words, rather than using the story of Kongming and Qi Men Dun Jia, I only used his Qi Men Dun Jia as a part of the setting. It doesn’t mean that

---

[42] A surname of Asian origin

[43] Yotsubamugura img →
https://www.google.com.sg/search?q=%E3%83%A8%E3%83%84%E3%83%90%E3%83%A0%E3%82%B0%E3%83%A9&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=pK1pVdODApWVuASWiIHACA&ved=0CB8QsAQ&biw=1351&bih=228

[44] Tsukubanesou (sorry, no English)→
http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E3%83%84%E3%82%AF%E3%83%90%E3%83%8D%E3%82%BD%E3%82%A6

Zhuge Liang wasn’t depicted in ‘The Romance of the Three Kingdoms’, in the end, I was just using the setting of Qi Men Dun Jia in this story.

I’m heart fully thankful to you for having read this series up to here. If it suits you, please look forward to the next installment Volume 16 ’Yotsuba Succession Arc’.

(Satou Tsutomu)

魔法科高校の劣等生⑮

古都内乱編<下>

二〇九六年、九月下旬。

四葉家当主・四葉真夜による「横浜から逃亡した周公瑾の捕縛に関する協力依頼」を受けた司波兄妹は、京都で九島光宣と出会う。その光宣と共に周の捜索を行うも、手がかりは未だ掴めなかった。

そんな折、七草家のボディガード・名倉の訃報が達也たちのもとへ届く。弔い合戦として、周捜索に真由美も参戦、事態は動き出す。

ついに周の潜伏先を突き止めた達也は、とある過去の強敵へと連絡を取り――。

『クリムゾン・プリンス』一条将輝、『四葉の最終兵器』司波達也が共闘！

緊迫の古都内乱編、完結！

魔法科高校の劣等生15

古都内乱編〈下〉

The irregular at magic high school

佐島勤

Tsutomu Sato

illustration／石田可奈

Kana Ishida

電撃文庫

さ-14-17

魔法科高校の劣等生⑮

古都内乱編〈下〉

佐島勤

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佐島勤

西暦19XX年、日本の片田舎に生まれる。和洋のスペースオペラを糧に少年時代を過ごす。青年時代、ファンタジーと伝奇小説に転向。卒業後、企業戦士（ただし雑兵）として現実世界に魂を売り渡すも、西暦2011年、遅れてきたジュブナイル作家として空想世界に帰還を果たす。（本プロフィールには虚偽と誇張表現が含まれています）

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魔法科高校の劣等生⑭⑮ 古都内乱編<上><下>
ドウルマスターズ1、2

イラスト：石田可奈

西暦19XX年生まれ。挿絵は初仕事。本業はアニメーター。アニメ「俺の妹。」の総作画監督を担当。「魔法科高校」ではキャラクターデザイン、総作画監督もつとめた。
SpecialThanks：ジミーストーンさん。

魔法科高校の劣等生

The irregular at magic high school

佐島勤 Tsutomu Sato
illustration 石田可奈 Kana Ishida

西暦二〇九六年十二月。
深雪の許へ四葉本家から、一族の有力者が顔を揃える新年の集い、
「慶春会」の招待状が届く。
例年と違い、そこには「元旦に必ず出席すること」という指示が添えられていた。
それを見て深雪は、「遂にこの時が来た」という予感を覚える。
四葉家次期当主の指名。
――自分が後継者に選ばれれば、兄も日陰者に甘んじなくて済む。
――次期当主の地位にはきっと、それに相応しい「婚約者」が付いてくる。
深雪の心は千々に乱れる。
学校が冬休みに入り、本家へ向かう達也、深雪、水波の三人。
何者かによる妨害を退け、ようやく四葉本家へ出頭した達也たちは、

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主役は、劣等生・司波達也の妹にして
完璧な優等生・司波深雪。
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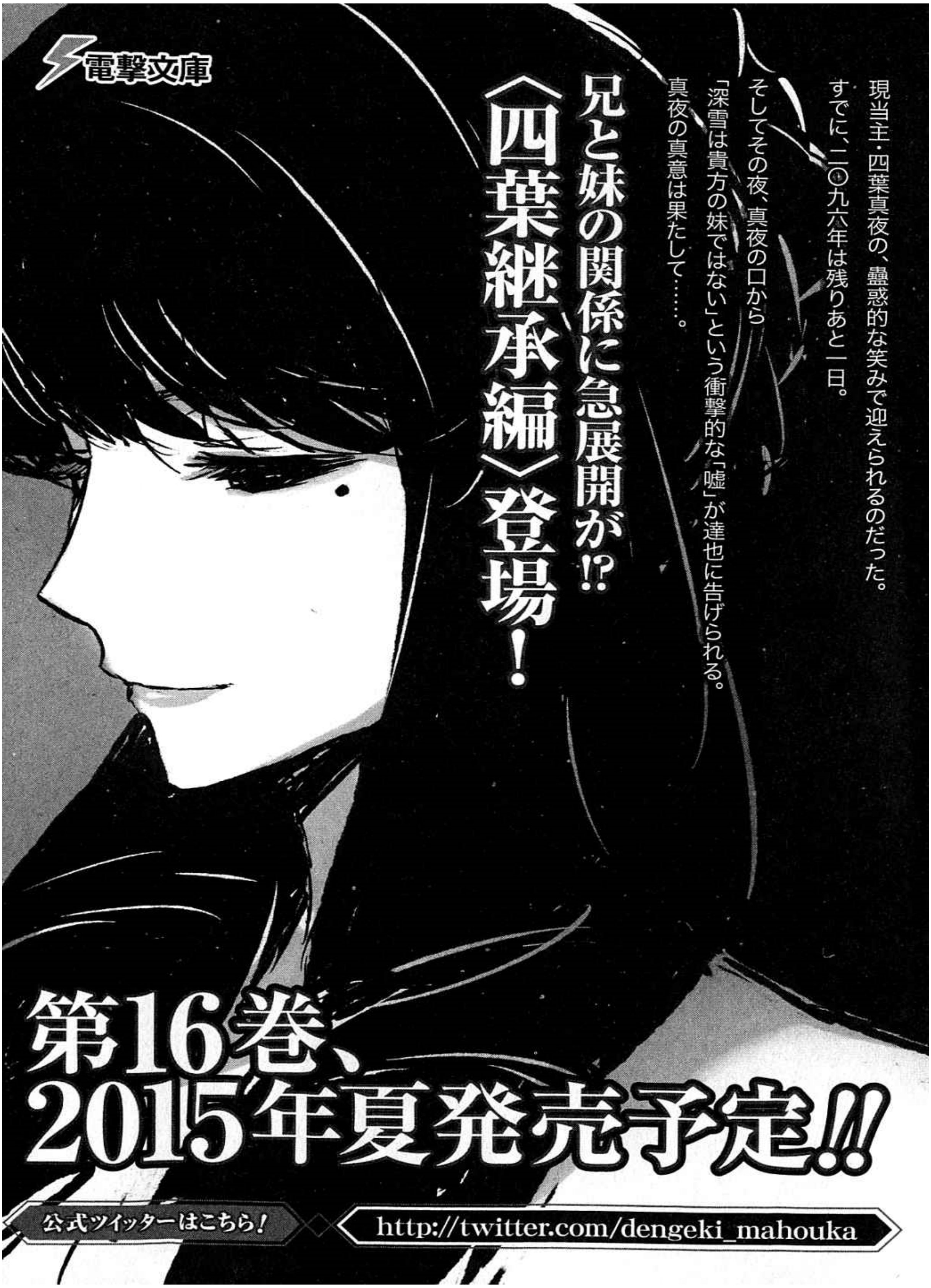

電撃文庫

現当主・四葉真夜の、蠱惑的な笑みで迎えられるのだった。
すでに、二〇九六年は残りあと一日。

そしてその夜、真夜の口から
「深雪は貴方の妹ではない」という衝撃的な「嘘」が達也に告げられる。
真夜の真意は果たして……。

兄と妹の関係に急展開が⁉
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本書に対するご意見、ご感想をお寄せください。

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魔法科高校の劣等生⑮

古都内乱編〈下〉

佐島 勤

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電撃文庫創刊に際して

文庫は、我が国にとどまらず、世界の書籍の流れのなかで〝小さな巨人〟としての地位を築いてきた。古今東西の名著を、廉価で手に入りやすい形で提供してきたからこそ、人は文庫を自分の師として、また青春の想い出として、語りついできたのである。

その源を、文化的にはドイツのレクラム文庫に求めるにせよ、規模の上でイギリスのペンギンブックスに求めるにせよ、いま文庫は知識人の層の多様化に従って、ますますその意義を大きくしていると言ってよい。

文庫出版の意味するものは、激動の現代のみならず将来にわたって、大きくなることはあっても、小さくなることはないだろう。

「電撃文庫」は、そのように多様化した対象に応え、歴史に耐えうる作品を収録するのはもちろん、新しい世紀を迎えるにあたって、既成の枠をこえる新鮮で強烈なアイ・オープナーたりたい。

その特異さ故に、この存在は、かつて文庫がはじめて出版世界に登場したときと、同じ戸惑いを読書人に与えるかもしれない。

しかし、〈Changing Times,Changing Publishing〉時代は変わって、出版も変わる。時を重ねるなかで、精神の糧として、心の一隅を占めるものとして、次なる文化の担い手の若者たちに確かな評価を得られると信じて、ここに「電撃文庫」を出版する。

1993年6月10日
角川歴彦

電撃文庫

魔法科高校の劣等生① 入学編〈上〉

佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

累計３０００万ＰＶのＷＥＢ小説が電撃文庫で登場！ 全てを達観した兄と、彼に密かに想いを寄せる妹。二人が魔法科高校に入学したときから、その波乱の日々は幕開いた。

さ-14-1 2157

魔法科高校の劣等生② 入学編〈下〉

佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

優等生の妹・深雪が加入した魔法科高校生徒会。劣等生の兄・達也はその生徒会の強引な依頼で、違反行為を取り締まる風紀委員メンバーとなるが、そこでも波乱の日々は続き――。

さ-14-2 2171

魔法科高校の劣等生③ 九校戦編〈上〉

佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

『九校戦』の季節がやってきた。全国から集まった魔法科高校生の、若きプライドを賭けた勝負が始まる。夏の一大イベントに沸き立つ生徒たち。唯一、司波達也を除いて――。

さ-14-3 2220

魔法科高校の劣等生④ 九校戦編〈下〉

佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

『九校戦』に技師として無理矢理参加させられた〝劣等生〟の達也。彼は、未来の魔法師たちがぶつかりあうこの競技の裏で暗躍する、ある組織の存在に気づく。

さ-14-4 2239

魔法科高校の劣等生⑤ 夏休み編＋１

佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

今度の『魔法科』はウェブ未公開の書き下ろしを含む計六編の特別編！ 達也と深雪の物語の裏で起こっている、彼ら彼女らの意外なエピソードが紐解かれる！

さ-14-5 2308

電撃文庫

魔法科高校の劣等生⑥ 横浜騒乱編〈上〉
佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

全国の高校生による、魔法学・魔法能力・魔法技術を披露する舞台『魔法学論文コンペティション』。司波達也が持つ類い希なる頭脳と能力はそこでも大いに期待され……。

さ-14-6 2359

魔法科高校の劣等生⑦ 横浜騒乱編〈下〉
佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

『論文コンペ』会場である横浜に、異国の魔術師たちが侵入した。ついに司馬達也は、恐るべき〝禁断の力〟の解放に踏み切るのだった。華麗なる司波兄妹の活躍に、刮目せよ。

さ-14-7 2398

魔法科高校の劣等生⑧ 追憶編
佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

今から三年前。司波深雪にとって、忘れられない『出来事』があった。その『出来事』から深雪は変わった。兄との関係も。兄に向ける、自分の心も――。

さ-14-8 2451

魔法科高校の劣等生⑨ 来訪者編〈上〉
佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

雫と『交換留学』で魔法科高校にやってきた金髪碧眼の美少女リーナ。彼女を見た達也は、瞬時にその『正体』に気づき……。司波兄妹の学園生活に、再び波乱が巻き起こる。

さ-14-9 2500

魔法科高校の劣等生⑩ 来訪者編〈中〉
佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

『吸血鬼』事件の全容は次第に明らかになりつつあった。通常の魔法では太刀打ち出来ず、未知からの『来訪者』である彼らが、ついに魔法科高校に襲来する！

さ-14-10 2548

電撃文庫

魔法科高校の劣等生⑪
来訪者編〈下〉

佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

ロボットに寄生した『パラサイト』――ピクシーは、達也に付き従うことを決める。別次元からの『来訪者』を巡った激突は、魔法科高校を舞台に最終決戦を迎える！

さ-14-11　2582

魔法科高校の劣等生⑫
ダブルセブン編

佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

二学年の部、開幕！　生徒会メンバーとなった達也と深雪の前に、ユニークな『新入生』が現れる。彼らは、「七」の数字を持つ『ナンバーズ』で……。

さ-14-12　2619

魔法科高校の劣等生⑬
スティープルチェース編

佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

今年の『九校戦』はひと味違っていた。新種目『スティープルチェース・クロスカントリー』への対応が急がれる中、九校戦を舞台に新たな陰謀が企てられる。

さ-14-13　2717

魔法科高校の劣等生⑭
古都内乱編〈上〉

佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

パラサイドール事件の黒幕・周公瑾の捕縛を四葉家から依頼された達也と深雪は、潜伏先である京都へ向かう。そこで、二人は『作られた天才魔法師』と運命の出会いを果たす。

さ-14-15　2801

魔法科高校の劣等生⑮
古都内乱編〈下〉

佐島 勤
イラスト／石田可奈

パラサイドール事件の黒幕・周公瑾を追う司波達也。九島家の天才魔法師・光宣と共に、ついに潜伏先を突き止めるが、そこは意外な場所で……。　一条将輝登場の下巻発売！

さ-14-17　2866

電撃文庫

ドウルマスターズ1
佐島 勤
イラスト／tarou2

西暦２４００年代。パイロットのサイキック能力を拡張再現し、物理干渉力に変換する人型機動兵器『ドウル』を操る少年少女たちの、『世界』を賭けた闘いが、今始まる。

さ-14-14 2767

ドウルマスターズ2
佐島 勤
イラスト／tarou2

精神力を物理変換する人型兵器ドウルのパイロットである蒼生は、朱理、玲音、龍一と共に宇宙で厳しい訓練を受けていた。そして、彼らに『運命の時』がやってくる。

さ-14-16 2849

軋む楽園（エデン）の葬花少女（グリムリーパー）
鷹野 新
イラスト／せんむ

〝葬花少女〟それは、謎の生命体レギオンから世界を守る人類の最終兵器。少女たちとの出会いによって、高校生・葛見の運命は苛烈にその色を変えていく——。

た-28-3 2705

軋む楽園（エデン）の葬花少女（グリムリーパー）Ⅱ
鷹野 新
イラスト／せんむ

レーヴァンとして覚醒した高校生・葛見は、葬花少女達と共にクリサリスを解放した、はずだった。冷酷に迫り来る破滅と絶望の中、葛見達が見たものは——！

た-28-4 2770

軋む楽園（エデン）の葬花少女（グリムリーパー）Ⅲ
鷹野 新
イラスト／せんむ

熾烈を極めたアイリス戦の終結。だが、その戦いを妨害した人物が——。捜索する葛見達が知る驚愕の事実とは⁉ 〝彼女〟はなぜ人類を裏切ったのか——？

た-28-5 2872

電撃文庫

魔王なあの娘と村人A

～幼なじみは勇者です～

ゆうきりん
イラスト／赤人

彼女は《魔王》のくせに一人ぼっち。対する《勇者》の女の子はトラブルメーカー!? 〝ファンタジー世界の住人を育成する学校〟を舞台に、村人Aの受難の日々が始まる!!

ゆ-1-25　2125

魔王なあの娘と村人A②

～牛と勇者とパンプキン～

ゆうきりん
イラスト／赤人

「さ――村人Aさん、どうしたんですか?」今日も今日とて人類殲滅を企む〝ぼっち〟の《魔王》竜ヶ峯桜子。謎の行動を繰り返す彼女の監視を頼まれた佐東だったが……。

ゆ-1-26　2222

魔王なあの娘と村人A③

～ロボ娘は今日も空を飛べない～

ゆうきりん
イラスト／赤人

先生からロボの《個性》をもつ不登校少女のことを頼まれ、さらに文化祭で《個性者》との合同劇を仕切ることになった佐東。彼らと一般人の『壁』をどう壊す!?

ゆ-1-27　2316

魔王なあの娘と村人A④

～めっちゃメタなフェスティバル～

ゆうきりん
イラスト／赤人

「個性者たちと共同で劇をする」という学園祭の無理難題に挑む佐東。しかし《魔王》竜ヶ峯の力を借りても、強い〝個性〟を持つ彼らとの協力は一筋縄ではいかず……。

ゆ-1-28　2409

魔王なあの娘と村人A⑤

～リンカンクエスト! ドリアン風味～

ゆうきりん
イラスト／赤人

文化祭を無事乗り切ったのも束の間、新たなイベント・林間学校がやってきた。もちろん《個性者》の面々も一緒で――! いろんな意味でドキドキの二泊三日が幕を開ける!!

ゆ-1-29　2507

電撃文庫

魔王なあの娘と村人A⑥ ～彼女の普通とあの娘の特別～
ゆうきりん
イラスト／赤人

「個性者をやめたいんです」。《メデューサ》の個性を持った少女・石杷実鬼灯の前代未聞の相談が、《村人A》に振りかかる！ シリーズ第6弾!!

ゆ-1-30 2589

魔王なあの娘と村人A⑦ ～スラップスティックエブリデイ～
ゆうきりん
イラスト／赤人

《個性者》たちと過ごす冬のエピソードを描いたシリーズ第7弾！ クリスマス、お正月、バレンタイン……。様々なシチュエーションで魔王が人類殲滅します!?

ゆ-1-31 2677

魔王なあの娘と村人A⑧ ～アップダウンスパイラル～
ゆうきりん
イラスト／赤人

ついに2年生編突入！ クラス替えで《勇者》の翼とも一緒のクラスになり、ますます慌ただしくなりそうな《村人A》の日常は果たしてどうなる……!?

ゆ-1-32 2793

魔王なあの娘と村人A⑨ ～村人たちの秘密のクエスト～
ゆうきりん
イラスト／赤人

《魔王》と《勇者》が争う生徒会長選挙戦がついにスタート！ 投票日の前にはなんと体育祭もあって!? イベントづくしで大波乱の予感満載のシリーズ第9弾！

ゆ-1-33 2875

課外活動サバイバルメソッド
水瀬葉月
イラスト／悠久ポン酢

保健室を根城にするグータラ女と、幼馴染の保健委員。彼女たちと過ごす俺の日常は、理不尽な〝課外活動〟によって一変した。巨大学園を舞台に脱出不可能の異能力サバイバルが開幕。

み-7-29 2876

電撃文庫

未踏召喚://ブラッドサイン
鎌池和馬
イラスト／依河和希

『神々よりも奥に潜む者』さえ呼び出す最新鋭召喚師。その中でも最強と謳われる『不殺王』こと城山恭介。彼の唯一の弱点は、『たすけて』という少女の『呪いの言葉』で……。

か-12-50　2802

未踏召喚://ブラッドサイン②
鎌池和馬
イラスト／依河和希

最強無敵の召喚師・城山恭介は、同じクラスの図書委員ちゃんからの『たすけて』を受け、依代として契約を結ぶ。襲い来るもの——死んだ姉の幽霊から、彼女を守るために。

か-12-53　2868

青春ブタ野郎はバニーガール先輩の夢を見ない
鴨志田一
イラスト／溝口ケージ

図書館で捕獲した野生のバニーガールは、高校の上級生にして活動休止中の人気タレント桜島麻衣先輩でした。海と空に囲まれた町で、僕と彼女の恋にまつわる物語が始まる。

か-14-22　2721

青春ブタ野郎はプチデビル後輩の夢を見ない
鴨志田一
イラスト／溝口ケージ

麻衣先輩と恋人同士になった翌日。朝起きたら、付き合う前に戻っていた！　青春のバカ野郎！　原因を探す咲太の前に、尻を蹴り合った仲の後輩・朋絵が現れて!?

か-14-23　2788

青春ブタ野郎はロジカルウィッチの夢を見ない
鴨志田一
イラスト／溝口ケージ

初恋の翔子と同じ名前、同じ顔の女子中学生の登場に焦る咲太。そんな咲太にまたも思春期症候群が忍び寄る。え、理央が二人いるだって!?　シリーズ第3弾！

か-14-24　2871

おもしろいこと、あなたから。

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上遠野浩平（ブギーポップは笑わない）、高橋弥七郎（灼眼のシャナ）、
成田良悟（デュラララ!!）、支倉凍砂（狼と香辛料）、
有川 浩（図書館戦争）、川原 礫（アクセル・ワールド）、
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